



Post Tenebras Lux Covenant Theology...

The Mosaic Covenant...

Exodus 2:24-25

Over the last few weeks, I have been trying to show that the covenant God established with Abraham was a perpetual, everlasting covenant. I have also been trying to show that the covenant was given first to Abraham in a bare bones fashion. It was only after God had made the covenant with Abraham that He began to fill in the blanks of all that the covenant entailed. In that sense, the covenant was progressive. God made the promise to Abraham and then began to fill in the details of all that that meant for Abraham. That was true of all of the blessings that Abraham would receive and it was equally true of Abraham's obligations with regard to the covenant.

I have spoken at length about how God's covenants had signs and about how God's covenants, even though they were always gracious, imposed demands upon the recipients.

Last week, we saw that that was true for Noah and we saw that that was true for Adam and Eve.

Now, I want to return for just a minute to Adam and Eve. The reason I want to do that is because reformed theologians have long since held that there were

really only two covenants. The first covenant extended from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 3:14. The first covenant was made with Adam and Eve and is routinely called the covenant of works. It had a sign, though there is some argument about what the sign was, and it had obligations.

And while the word covenant is not used in the section, the implications are easy enough to draw. God made demands upon Adam and Eve and those demands had to be kept in order for the covenant to be fulfilled. Now, in review, I want to point out what those demands were.

The demand was that Adam and Eve were to obey all that God had commanded them. Failure to keep His commands meant their death. I particularly like the way the Confession puts it:

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience¹.

Now, here is the point. God made a covenant with Adam and that covenant demanded perfect, continual obedience. Adam failed to keep that covenant and the consequence of his failure had an impact upon all of his children. That truth is made sufficiently clear in Scripture that I don't see any reason to press it further. The only thing I would add is that it seems clear enough that the actions of the parents were shared with their children. Of course, the individual acts of children brought further action by God but in no case were children spared the consequences of the disobedience of Adam. The result is, as one wag so aptly put it, that **"One out of one people die."**

Now when the covenant of works failed, God could have justly washed His hands of the human race but He chose not to do so. In fact, God instituted a gracious covenant to take the place of the failed covenant of works.

That covenant starts in Genesis 3:15, where God promised a seed to crush the head of Satan. We talked at length about that last time. I should add however that even then there was a sign of the institution of that covenant. One brother aptly pointed out to me last week that the sign of the covenant made to Adam and Eve was the slaughter of the animals that provided them with a covering before God. I think that is right. Even in its earliest stage, the covenant involved the idea of imputation or reckoning. Even at its earliest stage it is a covenant of blood. The animals were slain and their skins covered the sinful nakedness of Adam and Eve. It was, and I hope this obvious, the killing of the just for the unjust in order that the unjust might stand before God.

The covenant that starts in Genesis 3:15 extends throughout the rest of the Bible and beyond. And that is the principle point I want to make this morning. The covenant established with Adam and Eve, extended to Noah and restated to Abraham is in fact one continuous covenant. It is a covenant of grace. Listen to how the WCF puts it.

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe².

So, there were two covenants. The first, the covenant of works, failed and was set aside when Adam sinned. The second, the covenant of grace, was graciously put in place by God to redeem sinful man. It started in Genesis 3:15 and was fulfilled in Christ's death on the cross. But I am skipping ahead.

What I want to show this morning is that the covenant promised under Moses was not a different covenant than the one promised Abraham. It is the same covenant. It is expanded and further obligations are added but still it is the same covenant. We will discuss at a later point why those additional and seemingly harsh obligations were added but for now I would like to try to demonstrate that the two covenants are different administrations of the same covenant.

In order to do that, I would like you to turn to Exodus 2:24.

NIV Exodus 2:24...God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Now the children of Israel had been in cruel bondage for some 400 years just as God had promised Abraham in Genesis 15.

NIV Genesis 15:13...Then the LORD said to him, "**Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.**

It was at that point that God heard their groaning and remembered His covenant with Abraham. It wasn't that their suffering had failed to get His attention all along. It wasn't that He failed to have concern for the individuals that lived and

died in that awful place. It was rather that God was working out His redemption of a people for Himself. He remembered His promise to Abraham and decided to act.

Now what is remarkable is that He gave Moses explicit instructions to go to the children of Israel and tell them that He was at last fulfilling His covenant to them. You will remember, of course, that all did not go well. Pharaoh resisted God and Moses, but Pharaoh did not relent. Instead things got so bad, that it caused Moses to cry in protest to God. It was then that God spoke and revealed to Moses His great hidden, covenantal name. Look with me at Exodus 5:22.

^{NIV} Exodus 5:22...Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? ²³ Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all." ^{NIV} Exodus 6:1...Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country." ² God also said to Moses, "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, where they lived as aliens. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

Now, I could speak at length about the significance of God giving His previously hidden name Yahweh but I think the point I am trying to make here, and I want to make it before it gets lost, is that all that the Lord did for Israel He did because of the covenant that He had made with Abraham. That last phrase in Exodus 6:5 is particularly telling.

^{NIV} Exodus 6:5...Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

Now to further belabor the point, I would like for you to look at Deuteronomy 9:5-6. There, right before God is preparing the lead the nation into the land of Canaan, he reminds them of the reason that He delivered them in the first place.

^{NIV} Deuteronomy 9:5...It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ⁶Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

No one can ever accuse God of trying to falsely build up the self-image of the children of Israel. In fact, He goes out of His way to point out that the reason, the only reason, He is delivering them into the land of Canaan is because of His covenant with Abraham.

So, to sum up, the thing I would like you to see is that prior to the deliverance of the nation God gave the reason for their deliverance as the covenant with Abraham. In the midst of deliverance, God gave the reason for their deliverance as the covenant with Abraham, and even after the deliverance, God gave the reason for their deliverance as the covenant with Abraham.

Now, based upon what we have just looked at would you say the nation of Israel was under the Abrahamic covenant or not? Of course, they were.

All of which leads me to ask the question, “Why do theologians make reference to the Mosaic covenant at all?” And I will attempt to answer that question but before I do that I want to return to that name of God we looked at earlier, the name Yahweh. Berkhof writes:

It is especially in the name Yahweh, which gradually supplanted earlier names, that God reveals Himself as the God of grace. It has always been regarded as the most sacred and the most distinctive name of God, the incommunicable name. The Jews had a superstitious dread of using it, since they read Lev. 24:16 as follows: “He that nameth the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death.” And therefore in reading the Scriptures they substituted for it either ‘Adonai or ‘Elohim; and the Massorettes, while leaving the consonants intact, attached to them the vowels of one of these names, usually those of ‘Adonai. The real derivation of the name and its original pronunciation and meaning are more or less lost in obscurity. The Pentateuch connects the name with the Hebrew verb hayah, to be, Ex. 3:13,14. The meaning is explained in Ex. 3:14, which is rendered **“I am that I am.”** or “I shall be what I shall be.”

Thus interpreted, the name points to the unchangeableness of God. Yet it is not so much the unchangeableness of His essential Being that is in view, as the unchangeableness of His relation to His people. The name contains the assurance that God will be for the people of Moses’ day what He was for their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It stresses the covenant faithfulness of God, is His proper name par excellence, Ex. 15:3; Ps. 83:19; Hos. 12:6; Isa. 42:8, and is therefore used of no one but Israel’s God. The exclusive character of the name appears from the fact that it never occurs in the plural or with a suffix³.

So, you can see that the name YHWH was God’s covenant keeping name. Whenever it is used, it is used to stress the relationship to His people. (Hosea 12:9 and 13:4) One interesting sidebar is that the name Jehovah came out of the Jew’s resistance to even pronounce the name YHWH. Often they would substitute vowels for another name like Adonai. When they saw the word YHWH they would automatically read the word Adonai. All of that was fine until someone came along that no longer understood what was happening and

combined the two words together. The result was the creation of a new word Jehovah.

It was Christ's use of the word YHWH that got him into so much trouble in the book of John. You will remember the story in John 8.

NIV John 8:48...The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" ⁴⁹ "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." ⁵² At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" ⁵⁴ Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵ Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" ⁵⁸ "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Now, I want to add just two other things that will help you connect the Mosaic covenant with the Abrahamic covenant. The first is perhaps one of the strangest passages in the Old Testament and really thoroughly impossible to understand except for the connection it demands with the God's covenant sign.

NIV Exodus 4:24...At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met *Moses* and was about to kill him. ²⁵ But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched *Moses'* feet with it. "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," she said. ²⁶ So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.)

In this passage it appears that God intended to kill Moses because of his failure to obey the rite of circumcision, which had been given to Moses. You will remember that God had told Abraham that failure to circumcise one's children meant that they were cut off from the covenant. It is hard to know whether Zipporah was angry with Moses because she had to circumcise their son at all or because Moses had failed to keep his covenantal responsibility.

The second passage is in Exodus 12:43 where God is instituting the Passover meal. God places specific requirements on those that to participate and the only thing I want you to notice is how similar the language is to the command given to Abraham. First, let me read what was said to Abraham.

^{NIV} Genesis 17:9...Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner-- those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

Next, let me read what was commanded the Israelites.

^{NIV} Exodus 12:43...The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "These are the regulations for the Passover: "No foreigner is to eat of it. ⁴⁴ Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, ⁴⁵ but a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it. ⁴⁶ "It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones.

⁴⁷ The whole community of Israel must celebrate it. ⁴⁸ "An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. ⁴⁹ The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you." ⁵⁰ All the Israelites did just what the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ And on that very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.

Now, you may be wondering why I have spent so much time trying to show that the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant are one and the same. The reason I have done that is because much of modern evangelical Christianity is based upon a system called dispensationalism. It is the system in which I was raised.

In dispensationalism, there is an emphasis that Israel and the church are quite distinct. There is an emphasis that the way people were saved under the two dispensations was also quite distinct. In older dispensationalism, some even said that that people under the Mosaic covenant were saved by keeping the law, which of course cannot be right. If we know anything from the rest of Scripture, it is that no person was ever justified by keeping the law. If keeping the law saved the Israelites, then no Israelites were ever saved.

The thing I want to demonstrate to you is that anyone who is ever saved is saved by faith on the basis of Christ's atoning work. Salvation or justification is imputed to anyone and everyone who places their faith or hope in Christ. Abraham believed God and it reckoned or imputed to him as righteousness. Which leads me to ask have you availed yourself of God's covenant mercy in Christ?

Now what we find next week is that there was another covenantal sign added to the sign given Abraham. There was also a sign of covenantal renewal given. I suspect that you can already guess what it was but we will save that until next week.

^{NIV} Exodus 31:13..."Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy. ¹⁴ "'Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. ¹⁵ For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. ¹⁶ The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. ¹⁷ It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.'"

^{NIV} Exodus 31:16...The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. ¹⁷ It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.'"

¹ WCF VII, 2

² WCF VII, 3

³ Berkhof, 46