



Post Tenebras Lux Covenant Theology...

The Mosaic Covenant Pt.2...

Exodus 24:1-8

Over the last few weeks, I have been trying to demonstrate some of the basic or foundational concepts regarding covenantal theology. My purpose has been to demonstrate that a proper understanding of covenantal theology must start with the Old Testament. The notion of the covenant is not limited to the Old Testament but the foundation is there and any understanding we might hope to obtain in the New Testament will have to take into account what is revealed in the Old Testament.

I thought by way of review, I might spend a moment or two looking at what we have discussed thus far.

You will remember that we started with Abraham. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and told him to take his family and go to the land of Canaan. Abraham was 75 years old when God called him. Abraham's initial call contained four specific promises.

^{NIV} Genesis 12:1...The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and

whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Eleven years later, God revisited Abraham and again promised Abraham that He was with him. Abraham responded to God's promise to be his shield and his great reward by asking how it was to be seeing that he had no heirs. It was then that God instructed Abraham to sacrifice animals and divide their bodies. God then came down and walked through the divided animals and thereby confirmed the promise he had already made.

It was the sacred oath of the blood covenant. You will remember that I gave you several historical examples where people made promises to each other and performed this sacred rite of the blood covenant. The point being made was that whoever passed through the animals was placing a curse upon themselves if they failed to keep all that they promised in the original covenant. In effect whoever involved themselves in making such a covenant was saying, **"Let it be to me as it is to this animal, if I fail to keep all that I have promised."**

In this case, it was God who was making the oath. Abraham lay near the scene unconscious either from exhaustion or fear. But the point is that it was God that was making the covenant.

^{NIV} **Genesis 15:17**...When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, **"To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--**

Now, the question comes up at the point was the covenant unconditional or conditional. I waffled here by saying that in a sense it was both. It was

unconditional in the sense that any covenant God makes is a gracious covenant. He doesn't have to speak to anyone or reveal Himself to anyone. He is so wonderful in His transcendence that anytime He reveals Himself it is strictly an act of grace.

On the other hand, the covenant definitely placed obligations upon Abraham. So, in a sense it was conditional. God demanded certain things of Abraham. God also warned Abraham that whoever failed to keep the things thus commanded would indeed be cut off from the covenant.

^{NIV} Genesis 17:1...When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

Later in the same chapter, God tells 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."

Then finally, God warned Abraham about failure to keep the covenant.

^{NIV} Genesis 17:13...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."

It was at that point that we turned and began to look at the notion of covenant signs. You will recall that we noticed God said that the sign of the covenant made with Abraham was circumcision. That is the language plain and simple.

From there we turned backwards and looked at Noah and his family and saw that the sign of the covenant with Noah was God's bow in the clouds. The language was almost exactly the same as with Abraham.

^{NIV} Genesis 9:12...And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

We even speculated about the first covenant made with Adam, which is usually known as the covenant of works. You will remember that the first covenant with Adam promised life to Adam upon the condition of his full and continued obedience. Adam failed to keep that covenant and was separated from the Garden and from the Tree of Life. You will remember that even though the word covenant is not used in the first few chapters of Genesis we see all of the constituent parts a covenant including a sign of the covenant, which was the Tree of Life itself.

Even when Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden there was an attendant sign God's gracious promise to provide a seed that would ultimately bruise the head of the serpent. Though they faced expulsion from the Garden, God still demonstrated grace toward Adam and Eve and covered their sinfulness with the skin of a slaughtered animal.

It was at that point that I posed the idea that there is only one covenant of grace in the Bible. The covenant given to Adam and Eve in seed form in the provision of a covering and in the promise of a seed was the beginning of the covenant of grace. It was expanded and given an additional sign under Noah and then was expanded and given an additional sign under Abraham. But it was the same covenant or promise of grace. And the principle point I am trying to make is that the covenant of grace was progressive.

When God began to work out His great act of kindness in the covenant of grace, he did not reveal it in completed form. We saw that that was particularly true with Abraham. There was first a promise and then that promise was clarified. Then God explained to Abraham that Abraham and his seed had obligations. They were to do certain things and failure to do those things meant that they were cut off from the covenant.

I then went on to try and show that the Mosaic covenant was a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant. I wanted to make that point clear because there are many people who say that the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional while the Mosaic covenant was conditional. There are some that even say that under the Mosaic covenant God returned to a covenant of works. Some even say that under the Mosaic covenant people were saved by keeping the law. Of course if that were true, it would mean that no people under the Mosaic covenant were saved at all. I think the main point is that just because covenant had obligations did not mean that salvation was by works. Instead, it meant that genuine believers applied themselves to live a life of consistent obedience before the Lord. An active, obedient life was a reflection of the gratitude a person felt for all the kindness God had done. It was not the means by which one stayed under the

covenant. Rather, obedience demonstrated whether one was really a covenant believer in the first place. It was not perfect obedience; it was a life of consistency that pointed toward the greater reality of genuine faith.

To understand that is pivotal. What it meant was this. There were people in the covenant community who were not actually believers. There were people who had the sign of the covenant, enjoyed the blessings of being associated with the people of God but who were because of unbelief were not actually believers.

Now having said all that I want to make one more point and then we will be ready to begin this week's lesson. There are two parts of being under the covenant. First, there was the initiation to the covenant. This sign of initiation is easy to see in Abraham. The rite or sign of initiation was circumcision. Then beyond that there was a sign of covenant renewal. In Abraham's case, it occurred when God came down and ate with Abraham and renewed His promise to fulfill all that Abraham had been promised. There is a sense in which God renewed the covenant with Abraham several times. There was the initial promise, the initial sign and the subsequent renewal of that promise time and again.

With the children of Israel, the sign of initiation was the same as for Abraham but the signs of covenant renewal were different. To be a part of God's covenant people required circumcision but the sign of covenant renewal was differed and changed. We can know that from Exodus 12.

^{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.

You will notice that the language I almost exactly the same as that which God used with Abraham. But here is the point. They became members of the covenant community through circumcision and then God renewed His promise to deliver and protect them through the yearly observance of the Passover.

When the children of Israel were wandering about in the wilderness, God confirmed His promise to be their God in much the same way by feeding them with manna and water from the rock. He renewed His promises day by day to be their covenant God. That helps to make sense of such passages as:

^{NIV} **Psalm 143:8**...Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. ⁹ Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you.

And this idea of covenant renewal is repeated over and over again. Sometimes it is passages that seem obscure. Of course, the reality of God's faithfulness is always the underlying idea. Look for example at Exodus 24.

^{NIV} **Exodus 24:9**...Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰ and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

Now imagine, eating in the presence of God. Moses, Aaron and the seventy elders of Israel went up onto the mountain of God and saw Him there but they did not just watch, they ate and drank before the Lord. It was a sign of covenant renewal to the nation. It was a sign of God's peace. You will notice that it says, God did not stretch out His hand against them. God was demonstrating His faithfulness to them. And it is the same sign that we will be seeing later this morning.

The point is that God is at peace with His people and He feeds them and provides for them. Of course, the Lord's Table means more than that but it means at least that.

Now I want to make that point as clear as I can because there are other signs of covenant renewal. The sign of the Sabbath is much the same kind of sign.

NIV Exodus 31:12...Then the LORD said to Moses, 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.'"

You can see that the sign of the Sabbath was not a sign of initiation. It was given to the sons of Israel, who had to be circumcised to be sons. But it was a sign of

the covenant nevertheless. It was a sign of covenant renewal. It was repeated and often to show God's restoration of all that was lost in the fall. For there is a real sense in which the sign of the Sabbath recalls creation. God rested after His labor and with the institution of the Sabbath God's people could rest in Him.

Now you will see I hope that there are parallels between all these covenant signs of the Old Testament and the covenant signs of the New Testament. The correlation between the Sabbath and our Sunday worship is fairly easy to make. The correlation between Passover and the Lord's Supper is also fairly easy to make. I would even argue that the correlation between the initiatory sign of circumcision and New Testament baptism is fairly easy to make. And whether you accept that or not, you should know that that is where I am headed. But that will come later.

For now, I want to show that God continued to reveal the obligations of His covenant people. And there is one great scene in particular that shows that. After Moses had led God's people out of Egypt, He met with them at His mountain in the wilderness. There he had Moses recount for them all His ordinances. Look at Exodus 24:

^{NIV} Exodus 24:1...Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, ² but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him." ³ When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." ⁴ Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. ⁶

Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. **They responded,** "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." ⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "**This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.**"

Now, I am making this point because as you study these things and read some of the various commentaries, you will find that there are those who say that it was foolish for the Israelites to promise to do all that God had commanded. But I would ask you how that could be? Somehow, we get the notion that God was too serious with them about obedience. But that is not the case. God's demands have always been the same. They promised to strive to obey His law but they had been sanctified by blood first. Now, I want you to imagine that scene. Standing there at the foot of the mountain, Moses sprinkled the people with blood and they promised to obey. It is the same for us. We strive to keep His law not in order to be justified but because we have been justified. God's demand has always been perfect and complete obedience. He can be satisfied by nothing else. Of course, and we make this the central point of our hope before Him, the obedience that we are resting in is the obedience of Christ.

It is His obedience that saves us not our own.

It is His blood that saves us not our works.

And when we contemplate all that He has accomplished on our behalf we renew ourselves in God's covenant mercy. We come to the Table pleading God's mercy. We see Him renew His promise in the wine and in the bread. When we come on Sunday to worship, we see Him renewing His promise to provide for us a place

of rest. And that rest is in Christ. That is the principle point of Hebrews. But that is another lesson.

Let me close today by saying this.

The covenant or works was made with Adam wherein God promised life to Him on condition of his perfect and continued obedience. He failed.

Then God made a covenant of grace wherein He promised life to us on condition of Christ's perfect and continued obedience. He did not fail. And as we come this morning to renew our gratitude and to hear once again of His great mercy, we are reminded of Paul's wonderful words in Philippians:

^{NIV} **Philippians 3:9**...and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.