

# Covenant: Promises Made, Part 1 - Adam

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Genesis chapter 1, and we're going to start reading at verse 26. I'm going to read two sections from chapters 1 and 2. So Genesis chapter 1, verse 26. Then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Then God said, I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth, and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. There will be years for food, and to all the beasts of the earth, and all the birds of the air, and all the creatures that move on the ground, everything that has the breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food. And it was so.

God saw that all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their vast array. By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing. So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work, and God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. And so if you jump forward with me to chapter 2, verse 15. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat of it, you will surely die. The Lord God said, it's not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. And while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Okay, may God bless that word. I don't know how people feel about opera. I was chatting with a friend about music of various kinds, and the subject of opera came up. For me, it's something that's too big. It's kind of intense.

[ 3 : 2 9 ] Not really any clue what's happening. It always seems distant and remote, something I wasn't particularly interested in. But this friend I was chatting with, he has another friend who is an opera composer. So he's been to the opera with this guy who knows opera inside out, and now all of a sudden he's got these themes to look out for. It's like he's got these keys that give him a way into the world of opera. Now for some people, their thoughts on the Old Testament might be similar to my thoughts about the opera. It seems rather big. It's hard to get into. Some bits of it are really intense. Some bits feel really remote from us culturally, historically. It can be hard sometimes to get a handle on what's going on. And so one helpful way for us to get our bearings when it comes to the Old Testament is to look at some of the big themes that we find running throughout them.

And that's what takes us to the theme of covenant. It's one of these mega themes that you see from the beginning all the way through the New Testament as well, actually. So hopefully as we spend some time thinking about the covenants that God makes with various people, it'll help us to have a

big picture view of the Old Testament. So let's begin at the very beginning with the question, what is a covenant?

We can begin with a simple definition. A covenant is a binding agreement or a relationship between two parties. Some human examples. Marriage would be one. When people get married, there are promises that are made. There is oaths that are taken. There is a sign of a wedding ring that is exchanged. Or we can think of a mortgage agreement as another kind of a covenant. There's an agreement that's signed, the terms are laid out, and of course there is a penalty for failure to comply.

So the Bible talks about a variety of different covenants, sometimes between friends, sometimes human covenants. But here we're thinking about the covenants that God enters into with his people. And so you look through the Old Testament, you find there are a number of representatives that God makes covenants with. So we have Adam, and then we have Noah, we have Abraham, Moses, and David, and then we come in the later prophets to the new covenant. O'Pammer Robertson, an Old Testament scholar, he defines covenant this way. He says, a covenant is a bond in blood, sovereignly administered. So it's a bond.

[ 6 : 17 ] It's an oath that binds two parties together. It's in blood. There is that sense of a life or death, a commitment within the covenant. It was always understood in the Old Testament that life was contained within the blood. And so you'll find when you read about ceremonies to do with the covenant, that there'll be covenant cutting. We can think maybe of Abraham in Genesis 15. God comes and commits himself to establishing Abraham's family. And then there's that covenant cutting ceremony where Abraham is told to bring some animals, slaughter them, and cut them in half and to make a path through them.

And that was quite common as a way to seal a covenant. The parties would walk through as if to say, if I break my side of the covenant, let what happened to these slaughtered animals happen also to me. And that, in a sense, helps us to understand what's going on when Jesus dies on the cross.

Jesus goes to the cross, going under, taking on himself the covenant curse for our law-breaking. He stands as our substitute, taking the punishment for us having a broken faith with God. So a covenant is a bond in blood, sovereignly administered. It's administered by a king. And when we think of the covenants that God makes, they're not a covenant between equals, we are not equal parties with God.

God defines the terms, and his people must obey. The covenants come as an act of God's grace to his people. And we'll see these elements repeating through the various covenants that we find in the Old Testament. But one important overarching theme that Robertson reminds us of is the Emmanuel principle.

Remember one of the names of Jesus? He'll be called Emmanuel, which means God with us. Well, within the covenants, there's this idea that God would be the God of his people, and that his people would belong to him. I will be with you. I will be your God, and you will be my people. And we'll see this Emmanuel principle coming up a number of times. There's a pastor down in the UK, in Oxford, I think, called Vaughn Roberts, who tries to define it this way. Covenant is about God's people being in God's place under God's rule and enjoying his blessing. And again, these are the things that we'll see all the way from the Garden of Eden, all the way to the new covenant. And both our present and our future hope is that we would be God's people living under his good and loving rule with the hope of the new heaven and the new earth to come. So that's a covenant, a bond in blood sovereignly administered.

[ 9 : 27 ] But the question might come, well, why talk about covenant in Genesis 1 and 2? So Andrew read for us two sections from those chapters, and the vocabulary of covenant never came up. And you can read the whole of those two chapters, and you won't find the word covenant there. But the essential elements of the covenant are all there. So let me very briefly show you five elements of the covenant that we find in Genesis 1 and 2. First of all, a covenant always involves two parties. And we see that our two parties clearly identified. First, there is God, and he is unique as the creator. Chapter 1, verse 1, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So we have God, the king, the creator, enters into covenant with people who are unique as image bearers. It's significant if we read again, verse 26 of chapter 1, then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness. And compare that, for example, with verse 25, God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, all the creatures that move along the

ground according to their kinds. There's something deliberately being drawn attention to here, and it's the uniqueness of human beings as God's image bearers. So we've got the two parties within the covenant. We've also got blessings that are a feature of covenants. What are the first words that Adam hears when he is created? Verse 28,

God blessed them. Adam and Eve, God speaks to them. God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule. So the first words that the first people hear are words of blessing. They are brought into covenant relationship from the very beginning of their existence. They're given these commands. You notice they're all commands, be fruitful, fill the earth, rule, but those commands will bring blessing both to themselves and the world as they live in obedience to God. So a covenant has the promise of blessing. We see that here. Covenants also come with conditions, and we see that here too. Chapter 2 and verse 17, what's the condition? You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So for people, they must submit themselves to God's word.

They must trust him. They must trust that avoiding this tree is for their good. Another element of the covenant is that there is penalty for disobedience, and the penalty is clearly laid out in verse 17, for when you eat of it, you will surely die. Covenant breaking will bring death.

And there's also the sign of the covenant. There is another tree at the center of the garden, chapter 2 and verse 9, in the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So there is the tree of life, and there is this promise. There's this sign that walking in obedience for Adam and Eve would bring them access to God's blessing. It would give them life that would never end. A sign of God's blessing. And it's significant that that tree of life reappears in Revelation 22 when we are given this vision of the new heaven and the new earth. And there is the tree of life with its leaves for the healing of the nations. So what we see when we look at Genesis 1 and 2 is that from the beginning, mankind, humanity, we were made for a special relationship with God.

We were made for friendship with God. I was reading a journal this week, and there's an author who works in Oak Hill down in London, a guy called Dan Strange. He was writing a review of a movie called *Free Solo*. And that movie charts the feats of a free climber by the name of Alex Honnold. To free climb is to climb without ropes. So he completed a 3,000-foot climb up a ridge in Yosemite National Park called El Capitan, something that had never been done before. And so the movie was chronicling this achievement. And so Dan Strange, as he was reviewing it, was pointing to two things. Like, there is triumph within the movie. Here is perfection of body and mind working together to accomplish something remarkable. But as his story progressed, Dan Strange was saying there was also a clear evidence of tragedy. Not the tragedy of him falling to his death, but the tragedy of a man choosing a climb, choosing a quest over relationships with God and over relationships with other people.

[ 14 : 56 ] He was choosing in his life to be solo. Parents, girlfriend, friends were all secondary, very much secondary, to accomplishing, claiming feats. And that is tragedy. Because the story of the Bible from the very beginning was that we were made to know and enjoy God. And we have the commitment of God to show love to us. And we see that from the beginning with Adam and Eve and all that they enjoyed. And we see it, the commitment of God to love us as Jesus enters into the world that he created and he sacrifices himself to establish the new covenant. And so the story of the Bible is the story of God's mercy and grace so that we might know him, that we might enjoy him, that one day we might live with him forever. Now, how were Adam and Eve to live in this covenant with God? So we need to recognize that there is something unique about Adam and Eve's life. They were the only people who have lived in a world before there was sin and death. We also recognize from the Bible that Adam stands as a representative for all humanity. So in the New Testament, authors like Paul will say, we are all under either Adam as our heads or Christ as our head. One of them is the representative for all of us.

We'll talk about Adam and his sin leading humanity into death, whereas Jesus being the one who brings forgiveness and life and grace to many who trust in him. So there's something unique about Adam and Eve.

But there are things that we can learn for ourselves from Genesis 1 and 2, because here is God's ideal for how we are made to live as people. So let me just very briefly draw attention to two big principles that we find in these chapters. First of all, we are called to live, recognizing that all of life matters to God. And as people, we are called to live by trusting in God and his word. So let me

show you that from this text. First of all, to live by recognizing all of life matters to God. Sometimes we pair Adam and leaves life down so that we think it's simply about them avoiding eating the tree. But their life of obedience was more than just not eating the fruit from that particular tree. It was also about certain realities. It was about them observing the Sabbath to the glory of God, working to the glory of God, having a marriage that would be for the glory of God. So let's think about those three things,

Sabbath work and marriage. First of all, Sabbath. Chapter 2 and verse 3, we are told God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

So God's creation pattern, six days of work, one day of rest, and he gives that to people as our pattern. And the Sabbath, we clearly see from Genesis, is significant. It is blessed by God and it's for our good. As Jesus said, Sabbath was made for man, not man, for the Sabbath.

[18:43] Sabbath in the Old Testament was on the first level about resting, enjoying the gift of God's rest. It was about trusting. It was about trusting that God would provide.

Because not only did they rest one day out of seven, they and the fields also rested one year out of seven. And then there was the Jubilee year where everybody enjoyed a year of rest and return of slaves and all those kind of in the 50th year. And so while they were resting from work, they were having to trust that on day six and year six, God would provide sufficient to keep them on day seven, on year seven. So Sabbath is about resting. It's about trusting. And then as we see after the Exodus, it also becomes about remembering God's act of redemption and salvation. So in Deuteronomy chapter 5, when Moses gives the Ten Commandments, there they're told to keep the Sabbath because they had been slaves and God had redeemed them. So Sabbath is significant for Adam and Eve and for the people of God. But there is also work. Chapter 2 and verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Now they've already been told that they are to subdue the earth. They are to rule over the earth for God. And now it becomes clear that they're to enjoy creation by working in it. That work is a gift. It comes before the fall.

It's something that is a blessing. And so when we think about these chapters for ourselves, we then understand practically the importance of having this balance of work and rest. It's good for us spiritually. It's good for us physically as well. And we need to see both our working and our resting as a duty before God and also a blessing that God gave. Both our work and our rest and our trust and our worship are ways to bring glory to God. And it might be helpful for us to think about how we view our work or how we view Sunday. Do we see them as a duty that we have to go through? Do we see them as a blessing? Do we overwork? Do we underwork? Do we tend towards laziness or workaholicism? And we need to think through these things because they matter to God because all of life matters to God. We see that too in this first marriage. In chapter 2 and in verse 18, we discover that from the beginning, we were made for community and friendship. So the Lord God said, it's not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. And there was no suitable helper from the animals. So it became clear that God would need to do something else. And what we see is God working to create Eve. In verse, second part of verse 20, for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep.

While he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Marriage is sacred. It's instituted by God. It's instituted by God. It's necessary for Adam to have Eve as a suitable helper so they can carry out their creation mandate of filling, of subduing, of ruling, of working.

And we see in verse 21 that Eve is made from part of Adam, establishing that principle of marriage, making a one flesh union. So in chapter 2 and verse 24, for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they'll become one flesh. And so again, God's design for marriage is clear from creation. That's something that's confirmed by Jesus in the New Testament. You can look at Mark chapter 10, verses 6 to 8. And so for us as a church, it's got to be the Bible and not culture that defines how we view marriage.

[23:21] It also reminds us that our families matter to God, whether we're married or not, we're part of a family unit. And those family relationships are a place where we can exercise faith, where we can seek to witness to those who aren't following Jesus and they become a place to pass faith on. So there's one of the big principles we find within the covenant that we are to live by recognizing that all of life matters to God. But then specifically, Adam and Eve and us, we're called to live by

trusting in God and his word. So there was no general responsibility of Sabbath, work, marriage, but they also had one specific responsibility, one test that they are given. Chapter 2, verse 16 again, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat of it, you will surely die.

They enjoyed as a gift of God's generosity, a garden of yes. And there was just this one tree of no. Why? This tree is reminding them that God is the sovereign king, that his rule is not to be challenged by his subjects. They needed to learn to trust and submit to his word.

Graham Goldsworthy puts it this way. The perfect relationship between creator and creature, between ruler and ruled, cannot exist if the creature seeks to usurp the role of creator by rejecting his rule. And we can see the outworkings of that if we think about a family.

There is that authority established for parents over children. And if that was to be turned upside down, you would have chaos. Things would not be good. The relationship would not be right. And so for Adam and Eve, the test then is, would they submit to the word of God? Would they accept that blessing comes in trusting God's word? Sadly, we'll think about this next week. They failed to trust.

[ 25 : 58 ] They failed to listen to God's word and chose instead the words of Satan, the serpent, and sin and death came. Likewise, we are called to live out our days trusting God and his word also. But just like Adam and Eve, we too are tempted to go our own way. We too are tempted to set our own priorities and values.

We too are tempted to say no to God's word and to say yes to another word. Like Adam and Eve, we too fail in this test.

And that's where the life of Jesus becomes such good news for us as the people of God. The Bible tells us he comes as the second Adam and he comes in order to pass the test. Adam, in the first place, failed.

Because when we look at the life of Jesus, we meet someone who every moment of his life was lived in willing submission and in complete obedience to his father's will. Both in his life and his death, he trusted and submitted to his father's word. Taking him to the cross, where as we said, he goes under the covenant curse for his people so that by faith in him, we can live knowing God's covenant blessing. We are saved by grace through the work of Jesus, not our own.

And so the life of Jesus, the death and resurrection of Jesus become the hope beyond the failure of the first Adam. So as we gather together as the people of God, and as we gather to share the Lord's Supper, we are being reminded very visibly of the cost to Jesus and to establish the new covenant in his body and his blood so that we might be brought in, so that we might be free to live under God's loving rule, knowing his blessing now and forever.

[ 28 : 37 ] that the bread and the wine serve as covenant signs for us, reminding us of God's unfailing commitment to his people of his great love for us.