

Covenants

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 October 2022

Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0:00] The Bible's story shows us right at the very beginning how this world was made very good.! We thought about it being like a great artist, making this great piece of art, the most magnificent! The most magnificent piece of 3D art ever, the world in which we live.

And human beings were the very pinnacle of God's creation. They were created to rule, to beautify the world, the good world that God had made.

And they were called to increase in number. But the story changes very quickly into one of rebellion. The good world, once made full of color, of light, and life was now full of darkness and death.

Humans, once in a perfect relationship with God, were now banished from the presence of God. So what lengths would God go to fix the relationship?

That's kind of how we ended last week. Or the other question we were thinking that the Bible seeks to answer is, how can humanity dwell with God forever again?

[1:23] And we're going to see the beginning of this being worked out as we look at God's promises or covenants made to human beings. Promises made by God that really kickstart God's redemption plan.

The plan which will allow humanity to dwell with God forever again. And so as we begin thinking about covenants, I thought I might just ask, it would be good to have just a little bit of interaction together.

When I say the word covenants, what things come to mind? Words, phrases? Do you shout them out? What did you say? Marriage.

Yeah. Other things? Promise. Promise. Yeah, promise.

Contracts. Contracts. Interesting. Thank you. Definitely. Law. Law. Any other things?

[2:35] Cutting. Cutting. Cutting. That's a big word which will come out later.

Excellent. Maybe one or two more. Commitment. Commitment. Commitment. Yeah. Commitment or maybe agreement as well.

Any last words that spring to mind? I don't know.

I don't know if you can. But a French show for covenants is an alliance. An alliance. Cool. Thank you.

It's good to get us thinking a bit together, isn't it? I like the word contract. They are a bit like a contract. When you start a job, you have this agreement.

[3:34] You sign. You say that you're going to do this, this, and this for this amount of hours and this amount of money. They're a bit like that, but more. The stakes are much, much higher.

And they're divinely imposed by God. Covenants. A definition of covenants, which I've kind of worked on this week.

We'll see if we agree maybe later by the end. A divinely imposed agreement between two parties, often sealed in blood. We had the word cutting just now.

We'll see that in a bit. When God makes covenants with his people, they have terms that they must keep, which lead to blessing. Or if they don't keep them, then there are curses.

And covenants, they're a key part in the Bible's story of how God is going to work to bring him and people back to dwell together again.

[4:39] And the first covenant is found right at the beginning of time, right in Genesis 1, which we were looking at last week.

The covenant with Adam to fill and subdue the earth. To not eat the fruit from that tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And they were either to obey and live or disobey and die. Which is why people call this covenant the covenant of works.

You have to work to keep it. You have to work to obey it and be able to live in the blessings of it. Otherwise, if you disobey, that's it. It's broken.

And then we come to Genesis chapter 9, which we'll read in a moment.

[5:36] Which comes after the flood that God brought on the world. It's kind of an act of decreation that God brings in judgment of the world.

Because humans continued that rebellion of Adam and Eve. But God was merciful even in that judgment. In sparing Noah and his family.

God hadn't given up on humanity yet. He could have wiped out everyone. But there was still more to come. So I wonder, could I have a volunteer to read for us?

Genesis 9, 1-17. Someone be up for that. Asema. Yeah? Thank you. Now.

Yes. Yes, please. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[6:43] Thank you. Thank you. I am a creature who lives among the world, and the following fish of the sea. They are given into your hands.

Everything that lives and lives will be free from you. Just like you could bring in plants, I now give you everything. But you must not be sweet, but as lifeblood still lives.

And for your lifeblood, I will show you how to account for you. I will demand an accounting for every animal, and from each man too. I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God has God made man. As for you, be fruitful in increasing number.

Multiply on the earth, and increase upon it. Then God said to Noah, for his sons with me. I now establish my covenant with you, and will descend and trust with you.

[7:50] And will every little creature that was with me, the birds, the rice sticks, the Lord who are known, all those that came out to be out with me, every little creature of earth.

I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of the flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

And God said, this is the sign of the covenant I'm making with you. You and me, and every living creature of you. The covenant with all generations to come.

I accept my rainbow in the cloud, and it will be a sign of the covenant with me and the earth.

Whenever I be cut off by the earth, and the rainbow begins in the cloud, I will remember my covenant with me and me, and all the living creatures of earth.

Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy the earth. Whenever the rainbow came from the cloud, I will see and remember my covenant with me and all the living creatures of earth.

[9:02] And every kind of the earth. So God says, no, this is the sign of the covenant. I have established you to move within the night of the earth.

Thank you, Osama. We're going to spend a few minutes, about five minutes, just in our little groups. And we'll chat about these questions.

What similarities are there between this one and the covenant with Adam? And is there anything new? Off you go. What were new things that people spotted in there?

What were new things that people spotted in there? Uh-huh. I didn't actually find anything.

I made the... I can't remember if the patient in the first... I don't know. I don't know. I mean, that... I mean, that... Not a covenant made in the same way that...

[10:10] He made to... No. But there was a sort of... We thought that the... There was a... It was...

Yeah. If it was a Julia... Then you... A baker, in that sense. Then... Um... They would be fruitful.

Mm. And they would... Progress and become... As they wanted it to be. But... But... Similarity, isn't it?

Between that and... Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, it's a covenant which is going to last forever.

So... Yeah. Death has already come to the world. But... You still go on. Increase in number. Be fruitful. Yeah. Is that...

[11:09] Have I summarized what you've thought? Well or badly? I don't know. Yeah. Yeah. In a sense. I think, you know... God's plan is... The mountain...

Obviously. The island. Mm. And that's continuing. Oh. Yeah. Yeah. The continuation of life. Great. The thing is that they can now eat animals. Yeah. Yeah. It's not just the plants and the trees and things.

Yeah. Good spot. And Katie, you said... Rainbow. Rainbow. Rainbow. Excellent. Yeah. The sign of this covenant is the rainbow. A bow being kind of a symbol of war.

And God's laying it down. A beautiful covenant sign to remind God. Yeah.

[12:08] It is, isn't it? Not that God forgets. No. No. It's for our benefit. We see it and we can think, God keeps his promises.

Going back to that meat thing. In Genesis chapter 1, it does talk about verse 21 to 31.

It does talk about things as though they can eat beasts as we feel as well. And all the beasts of the earth, all the birds of the earth, creatures that move on the ground, everything that has breath in it. I give every green plant food and soap. So it seems to be into that they could eat meat there as well. Hmm.

Sorry. I don't know where you're looking. Chapter 1. They will be food and to all the beasts. It doesn't say specifically, does it?

[13:04] But he's giving the plants for them to eat. I give every green plant. Hmm. Hmm. I like it.

Yeah. Yeah. That's okay.

It's good. We're learning together. Cool. So that's a covenant with Noah. That's a covenant with creation in many ways, which is still ongoing.

And we still benefit from God hasn't flooded the world in judgment. But we're going to move on to even more exciting stuff.

It's all exciting stuff. Genesis 12. We read those few verses at the beginning. John Stott says of these verses, he says, These are really significant for us as we're looking at the big Bible story.

[14:27] Just a background to these verses. Pre this chapter, you have Babel, where humanity try and build their way up to heaven.

But God comes bringing that crashing down and disperses people and muddles their language. He's saying, you can't build your way to heaven.

You can't build your way back to Eden. Back to the way things were. How can humanity dwell with God again?

It's not by us building our way up to God. We're barred. So, enters Abram. And Abram's background was from a family that worshipped many other gods.

He was from a city called Ur, which was a big city. One where many gods were worshipped. I think moon worshipping was a big thing there.

[15:31] But God mercifully chose to take Abram out of that situation. And he chose Abram out of all the people in the world to make these big promises to him.

And here in chapter 12, we see God speaking. We saw God speaking in Genesis chapter 1. Speaking and life came to be.

But then in Genesis 3, the serpent speaks and death comes. But now we get to Genesis 12 and God speaks again. And it's like he's speaking to Abraham.

And a new creation, a new nation is forming. A new relationship between human beings and gods. And this is really exciting. New things often are exciting.

Starting a new job, a new relationship, buying a new car, starting a new book. It's often exciting. And this is really exciting. For human beings.

[16:35] And God speaks to him these promises. And they divide nicely into three. Firstly into people in verse 2.

Place verse 1 and verse 7. And blessing verse 2 to 3. So let's just think about those things for a moment. He talks about people.

He says, I will make you into a great nation. He's echoing the command of God for Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply.

He's talking about people. But now he's being very specific. He's saying, I'm going to make you into a great nation. And then he talks about place.

He's going to give them a land. A promised land. Adam and Eve had that place in the garden where they were in relationship with God. But they're being cast out from that place.

[17:40] But God is saying, I'm going to give you a new place. The land of Canaan to dwell in. The promised land. Adam and Eve. And then finally, he talks about blessing in these verses too.

Adam and Eve knew the blessing of a world made very good. They knew the blessing of that perfect relationship with God. But now God promises blessing to Abraham and his family and ultimately to the world through Abraham and his descendants.

Humanity has rebelled, but God's still not giving up on them. Restoring, beginning to restore his relationship with humanity.

I expect we've all in different ways made promises. I expect we've all then broken some promises. But the good news for humanity is that these promises of God are promises which can't be broken. They're made by God.

[18:50] And his word is sure. His word was sure in the garden. He spoke to Adam and Eve and he said, if you do this, you will live. If you don't do this, you will die. And those words came true.

He spoke those promises to Noah. And he still remains faithful to that covenant now. And so we can be sure, Abraham can be sure, about these promises too.

And they all depend on God. He says, I will make, I will bless, I will make, I will bless, I will curse. This is God's work. And he's choosing Abraham out of all the people to do this through.

But this world isn't perfect. There is still rebellion. The effects of the fall of the curses remain. And that's included in these promises.

He talks about cursing. Cursing those who curse you. The conflict in the world continues. But we're beginning to see, beginning to see the lengths that God would go to in bringing back humans into relationship with himself.

[20:09] But we still are asking the question, how can humanity dwell with God forever again? This is just one man and his wife. And they currently don't have a child.

These promises kind of depend on them having a child. So we move into chapter 15. We read earlier the first six verses of that.

And in Genesis 15, Abraham, as he's called still, has two questions of God. Two questions. The first is in verse 2.

He says, Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless? And the one who will inherit my estate is Eleazar of Damascus. I remain childless.

How are these promises going to happen? But God says, Look up at the sky. Count the stars. If indeed you can count them.

[21:09] Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. Don't know if you've ever attempted to look up into the night sky and count the stars that you can see.

If you kept going, you'd be there for a very, very long time. The stars are numerous. We can't count them.

Not on our own. And God is saying to Abraham, Look at them. I've made them. And I'm going to make your descendants as numerous as these stars.

It seemed impossible. They still didn't have a child. It looked humanly impossible. But God says, It's okay.

Look at those stars. I've made them. And you will surely have descendants. Abraham needs to trust God's promises.

[22:09] And then the second question he has is in verse 8. How can I know that I shall gain possession of the land?

That's what he says in verse 8. And so we get to some more covenant stuff.

And this covenant that God makes to show, I am going to give you a land to dwell in, involves cutting.

So we had the word cutting earlier. So have a look. Verse 9. Here we go.

Here's those animals. That's what God wants. And he says to Abraham, Cut them in two. And so he did. He arranged the halves opposite each other, the birds.

[23:15] However, he did not cut in half. It must have been very messy, him cutting that cow in half. But this shows the seriousness of what's going to happen.

The commitment that God was making to Abraham to show him, I am going to give you this land. You can count on me and my words to do this.

And so something very odd then happens. It seems odd. Abraham falls into a deep sleep in verse 12. And God says to him, You know for certain that for 400 years, your descendants will be strangers in a country, not their own.

That they will be enslaved and ill-treated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves. And afterwards, they will come out with great possessions. You, however, Abraham, won't see that. You will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. But he can know for certain that they will get a land of their own.

[24:31] So trust me, God says. And then to show him the commitment, we see this in verse 17. When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

God, in blazing fire, passes between the animals that had been cut. Usually, in Abraham's time, when covenants were made, it was a bit like this, but it involved the two parties.

This is just God who passes between the animals. It rests entirely on God himself. These promises are sure because of the Lord.

And we see Abraham's response to what God says. He says in verse 6, Abraham believed the Lord and it credited to him as righteousness.

A verse which Paul loves to pick up on in the New Testament. We're not going to think so much about it now, but at the heart of this covenant is faith. Faith in the Lord.

[25:50] It seems impossible that God might be fulfilling these promises to Abraham. They have no child.

There is no land that is theirs yet. But Abraham believes by faith. And then we're going to very quickly move to chapter 17 and see the covenant of circumcision.

But there's a couple of other things. Given the time, we'll just look at a few, three highlights from this chapter.

And first of all, we see a name change. Verse 5. Abraham's name is changed.

No longer will you be called Abraham. Your name will be Abraham. For I have made you a father of many nations. Abraham's name becomes significant.

[26:53] You will be a father of nations. The other highlight, another highlight, is that this is something which will be everlasting.

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and your descendants after you for generations to come. And verse 13.

Oh, I don't know why I put verse 13. Oh yes, my covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. And that's talking about the covenant of circumcision.

Another covenant which involves cutting. A covenant sign. An outward, unchangeable, physical sign of God's promises.

Promises that God says won't be broken. And as we, if we were to read the next few chapters of Genesis, we see that in their old age, when it was impossible for a child to be born, age 90 and 100, Abraham and his wife, they have a son of their own.

[28:10] A son through whom hopes of blessing from God, hopes that these promises will be fulfilled, are realized. There's an intriguing encounter in chapter 22 of where God wants Abraham to take his son as a sacrifice, his one and only son, this child of promise, up to a mountain and sacrifice him.

That seems crazy. If God was to ask you to sacrifice something, a special possession of yours, I wonder if you'd do it.

Abraham is asked to sacrifice his special chosen son of promise. Is this really what you want me to do? And he even lifts up the knife to sacrifice him, but then God provides a sacrifice in his place.

And surely he keeps believing as he goes up to that mountain in his gods by faith, knowing that God said, look at the stars, I have made them.

Your descendants will be as numerous as these. God's promises are sure, even when circumstances around don't look certain.

[29:35] So as we draw to a close, we've moved from the covenants with Adam and Noah, covenants of works, to a covenant of grace, a gracious covenant.

Human beings had shown they could not keep obeying God. And so these promises to Abraham, these covenants, they're dependent on God to keep.

God promises to Abraham an offspring or seed. He promises a great nation, which means many descendants.

But also the word used for offspring in Genesis, it's a singular word. We see that Paul picks this up in Galatians 3.16.

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say and to seeds, meaning many people, but to and to your seed, meaning one person who is Christ.

[30:47] ultimately through Abraham's descendants comes the Lord Jesus. In Genesis, we've seen that we can't dwell with God forever again by making our own way to God, by building a tower like they did in Babel.

It's by God coming down and choosing a man out of the world, a man and his wife, who in the most impossible circumstances have a child of promise. And in similarly impossible circumstances is another child of promise, born to a young virgin girl named Mary.

She wasn't even, she wasn't married. It seemed like an impossible circumstance and yet God brings that child of promise, the Lord Jesus.

And it's in Jesus that God fulfills those promises to Abraham of people, of place and blessing. In Jesus, he's creating a new people, a people chosen out of the earth to be his.

promises to be part of the special people of God and a place. We have a place to look forward to, part of the kingdom of God where we will dwell with God forever again.

[32:20] And promises of blessing. I love how Paul says that we have every spiritual blessing in the Lord Jesus. God's promises are sure and certain in the Bible.

And if we doubt, we can do as God told Abraham, look up at the stars. Look at the stars that God's created and know for certain that those promises to Abraham were fulfilled and he keeps his word, he keeps his promises.

And one of those descendants was Jesus. And just as there were signs of covenant, we had the rainbow, we had circumcision, we had the animals being cut and God passing through those pieces.

So we have a sign too that the Lord Jesus gives us. In the same way after supper he took this cup saying, this cup is a new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.

We have the signs of the Lord's Supper of bread and wine where we can look and see that promised descendant of Abraham, that promised serpent crusher we thought about last week and see that God does indeed fulfill his promise and Jesus was himself cut on the cross.

[33:53] that ends this week's second part of our Bible overview. We've seen a lot from those just those few chapters in Genesis.

You may well have questions. Please do ask me afterwards. Please do send me messages, emails through the week. I'd love to answer questions.

but it's good too when we're together to be able to pray together, to pray with one another, for one another and I thought it would be good to try praying in groups, in the groups that we're in.

So it would be great if you're comfortable to share something that you'd like prayer for with your group and then spend time praying together.

We'll spend 10-15 minutes. We'll see kind of the room goes a bit quiet when we're ended but it'd be really good to pray with one another as the Lord's people.

[35:02] So let's take time to do that now.