

Part 4: Covenant Promises

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- [0 : 0 0] We're on part four, and so we're dealing with all the covenant promises. It would be tempting to be able to spend several readings in Genesis and then make our way through. We don't have time for that, so I'd like us to turn to 2 Samuel chapter 7, and then we'll turn to 2 Corinthians in a moment. So 2 Samuel chapter 7, if you can imagine it this way, is you've come to the end of a very long road, and at the end of the road there's just a very big signpost with a big arrow on it pointing you to Jesus.
- And those verses are found in verses 8 through to 16. So this is 2 Samuel 7, 8 through to 16, and this is the signpost to Jesus.
- So this is God's covenant with David, and of course, Nathan the prophet has spoken to David, and David understands what's being said.
- Verse 8, Now therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be a prince over my people Israel.
- [1 : 2 5] And I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.
- And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them so that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more.
- And violent men shall afflict them no more as formerly. From that time I appointed judges over my people Israel, and I will give you rest from all your enemies.
- Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.
- He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Forever. Well, we'll leave that there, and we'll move on to 2 Corinthians chapter 1, and verse 20.
- [2 : 4 6] So 2 Corinthians chapter 1, and verse 20. And this is what we read.
- For all the promises of God find their yes in him. That is why it is through him that we can utter our amen to God for his glory.
- In other words, every promise of God is yes and amen in Christ Jesus. Well, we'll leave those two there.
- I know that there are only two readings, and there could be many more, but we'll come back to God's word after we've sung this next hymn. Well, I have many Bible passages in which I'll be reflecting on.
- Genesis 12, Genesis 17, for instance, Deuteronomy 11, 2 Samuel 7, and of course, 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20.

[3 : 59] There are many other promises within Scripture, and of course, this is part four of the original mission, and so we're looking at the promises of God or rather a covenant promise.

Now, over the years, you've heard me speak a lot about covenants, and that's because I firmly believe that unless you have an understanding of the covenants, you struggle to understand the Bible at least in putting it all together.

It's like having, you know, you've done little bits of your jigsaw piece, but it's not really coming together. So, now that we come this evening to part four, what is a covenant?

Well, a covenant is a binding agreement between two or more people. It's something has been declared, something has been promised, and both parties agree to this covenant.

And God, throughout Scripture, makes these covenants with different people, and these covenants have God's side and it has the people's side.

[5 : 03] And they're quite detailed in many respects, like the Mosaic covenant, for instance. But you can go all the way back to Adam, all the way through the Old Testament, and you can see, like with David, with Moses, with Abraham, God makes these covenants.

Now, for the Christian, we are most familiar with the fact that we are people of a new covenant. Now, what often happens is that some Christians can just be almost led to believe in a new covenant is just the second part of the Bible, which we call a testament.

So the New Testament is just what we refer to as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to the end of Revelation. But the New Testament, the New Covenant, is just more than that.

It's just not what we call the second half of the Bible. What does it mean to be a covenant people of God? And why should we need to understand it?

Well, I would argue because in a covenant, God makes promises. And I think promises, when they come from a promise-keeping God, keep us going.

[6 : 16] We're able to stand firm in our faith. We're able to enjoy the Christian life that we have because of promises that God has made. Now, with this in mind, we understand that this New Covenant is made in Christ Jesus.

And we also understand that in Christ Jesus, He meets all the conditions of the covenant on our side and on God's side. And this is why the New Covenant is really a fulfillment of all the other covenants and better than all the covenants.

What do you do when the covenant, in order for it to be fulfilled, relies on a people who can't fulfill their part? Well, you need someone who can fulfill it for them.

And so Jesus, in the New Covenant, lives the life that we can't live. He fulfills the covenant that we cannot fulfill. And so He covers the conditions of the covenant and, of course, fulfills the promises of God.

As we read in 2 Corinthians, every promise of God find their yes and amen in Christ Jesus. In other words, God fulfills everything in Jesus. My righteousness depends on Jesus.

[7 : 34] My acceptance with God depends on Jesus. My not falling away from God depends on Jesus. My holiness depends on Jesus.

In other words, everything about me as a saved person as it is with you depends on Jesus. Now, that doesn't mean that you can take from that, well, I can just live how I please.

No, you've got to understand how the New Covenant changes you. Now, we remember those words of Jesus who said that this is the New Covenant in my blood.

So now we recognize that we are a New Covenant people, but look at how expensive it was to make a New Covenant people. Just look at the cost of your life being without sin.

Look at the price that God put on your life not having sin in it. And you're taken immediately to the crucifixion.

[8 : 35] This is the New Covenant in my blood. And so we're reminded of the crucifixion, we're reminded of the price paid, the value that God has placed on your life being without sin.

And we're also reminded that on the cross Jesus says it's finished. Nothing more to do. I've done it all. So here we are sitting pretty before God with a life that is perfect in the eyes of God.

A life that can never be separated from God ever. All because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross. The other thing we notice is that in this New Covenant we get to enjoy promises that are fulfilled but we haven't experienced them yet.

And so as you know that the book Original Mission ends with us entering into these promises. And the promises are beautiful for God's people. I can't wait to live in the new heavens and the new earth.

I don't know how to take the fact that there will be no sea there because I think I'm going to miss it. But how do I take a verse like that? Bearing in mind the sea was always an image of throwing people around.

[9 : 52] The sea in scripture if you read it carefully you know Jonah being thrown into the sea because it's stormy the image of sea Jesus and the boat with the disciples and it's stormy the crossing of the Red Sea it was always an image of something that is disturbing that's happening or there is a disturbance there.

And is God just saying in the future well this is going to be a world without that kind of disturbance? I don't know I don't know how to read that entirely but boy am I looking forward to it.

Okay? I'm looking forward to it because God has kept all of his other promises I know it's simply a matter of time before that one I get to enjoy it as will you. And so the teaching of the new covenant this is the new covenant in Christ's blood teaches you and me you and I to live faithful to the covenant to live in a covenantally faithful way that our lives not only have a definite future they have a definite direction and this is the very thing that brings me great sadness because I in my heart of hearts am a churchman I use the old fashioned term a churchman I believe that it's the church that will change the world it is God's people that God through his church will change the world and I believe the church will one day will be completely united but we're not even close to that yet and that

I don't know but that is disturbing to me as a Christian of how that kind of thing can happen but I understand why it's happened and it is because Christians know that they belong to Jesus but often live with no sense of direction okay now this isn't about who's right and who's wrong here okay we could go into that but the issue the basic issue is that how many Christians live their life knowing that there's a future but not really with a daily sense of direction in other words nobody knows in the Christian well nobody that's an exaggeration but it seems at least that not many know that as they plant their foot daily in the will of God that they know actually what direction that they're going in now I want to take into account what God did with Joseph and I want to take into account what God did with Jonah as things that God can do in order to get his people where he wants them but it does seem to me that the new covenant when understood properly creates a very clear direction for

God's people that God's word is a lamp onto our feet in other words it is the very thing that directs us in the place that we should go but it seems to me it seems to me and I have to be mindful of myself as always when I say this that as we think about this that we're not actually sure where we're going that many Christians will serve in the church many Christians will do many other things but it doesn't seem like we're heading anywhere and I think the reason for that is because we've lost the sense of what a covenant is a covenant was always something that is moving God's people towards a future so let's begin with the old covenants right at the very beginning God made a covenant with Adam then he made a covenant with Noah and in biblical terms you know if you read them in textbooks they'll be called the Adamic covenant or the

[13 : 38] Noahic covenant or the Mosaic covenant there's simply a way of explaining that God made a covenant with these people so God made one with Abraham and then he made one with Moses and a distinction happens because the covenant made with Abraham was an unconditional covenant that means that God through Abraham made a promise that he would be a father of a multitude of nations of which we belong we are the sons of Abraham in the sense that we have faith Galatians go read Galatians we belong to Abraham if we belong to God through faith we're part of that promise the promise that God made to Abraham we are part of that promise if we have faith in Jesus now when it gets to Moses the covenant becomes conditional or it's a conditional covenant with Moses and it's a covenant of blessing and curses it means that as God people obeyed God they would be blessed but as God people disobeyed

God they would face his judgments and so the question emerges quite immediately that how can God keep his promises if it depends on both parties keeping their side of the covenant God keeping his side that's no question but how is God going to be able to keep his covenant if half of it depends on the people keeping their side of it and they don't what does God do then and we can see how that opens clarity for the need of Jesus the one who can fulfill what men and women boys and girls cannot fulfill it opens the door for us to understand the need of Jesus so the covenant with Abraham is unconditional the covenant with Moses is conditional in 2 Samuel 7 what we read God is promising a king and a kingdom of course that will last forever if you have a kingdom that will last forever you have a king that will last forever and as I said before the judges cycle every time there's a good judge the people are good but good judges die and then you have a bad judge and the people are bad and what do you need well you need a good and perfect judge who can last forever and the same with kings where every time you have a good king you more or less you have good people and if you have a bad king you have bad people what do you need you need a good king who can last forever it's clear that that's not going to be

David and it's clear that that's not going to be Solomon it's these covenants are exposing things that we need that the people cannot provide every single covenant that God makes leads to this conclusion so that we would eventually see the need for Jesus who is the good and perfect judge who lasts forever who is the good and perfect king who lives forever and whose kingdom is established forever every promise that God is making is leading us to the fact that if we can't keep our side then we need someone who can and so God sends his son into the world to do what we can't that is the only way God can fulfill his promises especially those ones that depend on people down here being able to do their part they can't and so God sends his son in order to do it who of course obeys God perfectly now it may be tempting at this point to go straight to

Jesus right now that we understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament let's forget about the Old Testament and let's just concentrate on Jesus we could do that I don't want to do that for a very simple reason I think it's important to understand how God was able to keep and why he decided to keep his promises with the people who would never keep theirs why is it important for you to know that even when you are unfaithful God will remain faithful why is it important for you to know that even when you sin God will forgive you of that sin I think it's important for us at least just to pause on why that is true and why that's important so we could go straight to Jesus but I want to stick with the Lord God in the Old Testament on how he was able to keep his promises with a group of people who clearly couldn't keep theirs or at least their side of the covenant so what does it mean to keep covenant covenant well we know that when Adam sinned he sinned covenantally we're told that he transgressed the covenant it's not that he was just an individual sinning against God he was an individual who transgressed the covenant that God made with him and his descendants

Adam transgressed that covenant and we learn that in the book of Hosea chapter 6 verse 2 we also learn verse 7 sorry we also learn that Hosea uses that as an illustration to explain what God's people in his day are doing he's saying you're doing exactly the same as what Adam did you've transgressed the covenant you're not sinning individually you're sinning against God that there's a covenant here between you and God and you're breaking your side of the covenant you're being unfaithful to God God is God's made this covenant with you and you're not keeping your side Adam was a covenant breaker God's people were covenant breakers and in the light of all of this God is the only one who is keeping covenant and what we ought to notice is that as God's people break covenant it reflects their character and it's this connection between character and covenant that we begin to understand why God kept his side character and covenant go together because they were sinful like Adam was sinful even though he was without sin when he transgressed the covenant their character is reflected through their sinfulness and so

[20 : 03] God's character is reflected through the fact that he manages to keep covenant with his people so let me just put it in a slightly different way what do you think would happen to you if God didn't just keep one of his promises let's just say out of all the promises he made there was one he didn't keep just one well what you'd have is what advertisers use is you'd have what's called intermittent reinforcement you would never know whether or not he'd break another one you could never be sure whether or not the one that you're relying on is actually one that he would keep or break you could never be sure if your prayer would actually ever be answered right if God didn't just keep one then you could never be sure that he wouldn't keep any of them and that's why it's important to understand God is a covenant keeping God it's reflective of his character a lady put it like this who not very far away from here was lying on her deathbed back in the day and the minister went to see her in

Haddington and as she was lying on her bed she was asked by the minister how can you be so sure that when you die you will be with God I mean he must have been a pretty bold minister I don't know if I would want to ask that of someone but he obviously knew her well and he obviously knew why that was an important question to her and her response is now in writing I mean people remember it and this is what she said she answered the minister and said if it were not true then God would lose more than me okay if it were not true that when I die I go to be with God if that were not true God would lose more than me for I would only lose my life but God would lose his reputation see she understood she understood the connection between a covenant keeping God a promise keeping God and character okay she understood that it's because of

God's character she can rely on the promise that it's because of who God is that that promise will always be kept that's how she could be so sure not because of her condition before God but because of who God is she understood that the promise would always be kept because of who God is now when we understand something like that we can then begin to understand difficult passages like Moses apparently changing the mind of God did he or didn't he and the issue takes place in Exodus 32 God has brought his people out of Egypt they've just transgressed the covenant they've made for themselves a golden calf they begin to worship it idol worship they declare that these are the gods that brought them out of Egypt and God turns to Moses if you can use that language and says to Moses let me aside let my wrath burn against them so that

I may consume them and then he says this which sometimes we read over and Moses out of you I will make a great nation okay God's people have transgressed the covenant God wants to wipe them off the face of the earth let his wrath burn against them and consume them utterly but God still wants to keep his promise and so he says to Moses I'll do it through you I'll make you the father of nations Exodus 32 verses 9 and 10 now I want you to notice what has just happened and Moses clearly understands what's happened and he is reminded of this by God so that he's able to pray the way that he did and it's this God never made the promise to Moses he made it to Abraham and if he then makes the promise to Moses that means he can no longer keep the promise to

Abraham do understand that even though God still promising a great nation will come he has to break his promise of Abraham in order to remake it with Moses and Moses knows God won't do that Moses knows that the reason why God's wrath will not burn against his own people is because of promise he made to Abraham long ago even though God would have the absolute right to let his wrath burn against these people who have broke his covenant Moses clearly knows that God can't allow himself to do it because if he did he'd be breaking his own promise so Moses even though he has promised that he can be the father of this nation this great nation that God will now do it through him Moses actually understands that God can't do that and God can't do that because for him to do it would mean that he would have to break his promise with Abraham which he doesn't do and so in this famous incident where it appears that

[25 : 26] Moses changes the mind of God that God actually wanted to consume his people and then Moses says hang on Lord let's have a think about this and God takes Moses words and goes all right now I understand what Moses shows us what the whole situation shows us which we would not see without it is the character of God and how covenant keeping is bound to his character and we don't have the time to give this the attention it deserves but what we can notice is this is that as Moses intercedes to God on behalf of God's people he's reminding God of the promise he made and it's that reminder not that God needs reminding but we get to see God's character here it's that very reminder in chapter 32 verse 14 where God realises or understands what

Moses is praying and so God is persuaded by his own character to keep the promise not by Moses okay it looks as if Moses is changing the mind of God but what is actually doing it is God's own character Moses is reminding God of God's character again not that he needs reminding and it's God keeping his character which makes him keep covenant he keeps the promises not because Moses persuaded him but because he remembers the promise he made to Abraham he doesn't break promise because he cannot break promise his anger does not burn against his people and Moses doesn't become the father of this great nation because it can't happen even though it may look like God would keep his promises it means that he'd have to break them to Abraham in order to do it and if God broke just one how do we know he couldn't break any more in the future and that's the strength of

Moses understanding and what we see the reason God keeps his promises is because God can't break his promises he just won't do it just will not do it and so we come to Jesus with great force that Jesus is the only one who can fulfill both sides of the covenant God's people have proven time and time again that they can't do it that everything that depended on them they were unable to do but Jesus was obedient to death even death on the cross everything in the Old Testament is a revelation that we need someone and that someone is Jesus everything in the Old Testament is a revelation that we can't keep God's law okay the law is given to demonstrate to us that we can't keep it okay it was misunderstood by the Pharisees in the day of Jesus because they thought that by law keeping you could be right with

God even though they understood that they were failing in certain parts of the law when you get to the gospel of Matthew what you learn is that Jesus is the one who's out in the wilderness being tempted and this is a picture of Israel being out in the wilderness but Jesus does not sin the other picture that you have is Jesus is ascending to the mountain where he declares the commands of God because he is it's called the sermon on the mount and that again is a picture of Moses bringing down the ten commandments from the mountain to God's people the image is point for point the same what Matthew is showing us is that here is the new Israel in Jesus we will see him do what Israel failed to do in Jesus we will see the commandments being kept Jesus will be the only covenant keeper and he'll keep it for us here's a few considerations then as we close as you think about the covenants in the

Old Testament and of course the new covenant you cannot help but think of God's character you cannot help but be reminded that God is a promise keeping God and neither can you help but be reminded that Jesus is the only one who could keep it for you we are forced to look at Jesus we are forced to Jesus to throw us ourselves on him and beg for mercy and God being merciful rich in mercy gives it the cross God in Christ Jesus reconciles us to him every promise of God is yes and amen in him so here we are as Christians living in this new covenant and we are meant to know what the new covenant is so that we can live faithfully to it covenant faithfulness is the opposite of Adam's covenant breaking covenant faithfulness is not to do what

[30 : 48] Adam did covenant faithfulness is to recognize that you have been set free from sin's dominion that you are no longer under the dominion of sin but you are under the grace of God you have God's enabling grace to be able to live in the way that God wants you to live God gives you his grace so that your life would produce in it the things that he wants to see that's why he gives you grace but here's the real joy all of that is joy as well but God made promises not just to one person but when God makes promises he does them in a big way he says things like to a thousand generations and we're not even there yet God makes promises way down the line to a thousand generations he's talking about children who haven't been born and their children who haven't been born and their children who haven't been born generation after generation all the way down the line they don't even know the promise that God has made to them because they're not even born yet and here we are reciprocants of the promise that God made to

Abraham what does this mean well it means that you shouldn't think as an individual you shouldn't be sat here thinking what is God's promise to me but you should be thinking what is God's promise to his people what does it actually look like you should recognize that you are the promise kept that God made to Abraham you should realize that the promise made in the Old Testament is the promise kept in the New Testament in Jesus so God's promise to people who are not yet born and already born still matters this is the only reason I believe that Christians can decide to have children why would you want to bring little children into a world where it's well who knows if they'll be saved or not 50-50 right I've got nothing to go on here but if you base it on the fact that

God has made a promise right now of course we all have to repent and believe it doesn't leave that out but it does mean that you're no longer thinking like an individual you are deciding to live your life based on the fact that God's made a promise and you argue those promises to God so Christian parents are able to come to God and say things like like Moses you told me okay I've read it I can show you in your word to go forth and multiply you told me to do it and now that you've told me to do it I want to remind you that you are a God whose mercy goes through a thousand generations Lord that includes my children I'm holding you Lord to your promise I'm arguing like Moses is and so should you why because you're you're it's not the strength of your argument it's not the strength of your character it's the strength of God's character concerning his promise and this means that we can look down to a thousand generations yet to come children grandchildren great grandchildren and go

Lord it applies to them as well you told us to go forth and multiply and you also said that your promise would cover those people yet to come and I'm holding you today to that promise okay just like Moses and I think because we have lost to think covenantally we don't think covenantally anymore we don't even think about great grandchildren we may not even think about grandchild week right when you when you buy a house none of you perhaps think I wonder if my great grandchild would like this right but that's exactly the way God would want us to think that far ahead but too often we just think individually and God wants us to think covenantally he wants us to think long term he wants us to think knowing that those promises are still there in the future in other words when you understand the covenant you're able to pray like Moses you're able to come before God and plead

God's character as Spurgeon said with himself you're able to wrestle with God and God would enjoy it that's the very thing that God is expecting you to do as you read in the Psalms so here's the exhortation as we close having a good understanding of the covenants is just another way of saying that you have a good understanding of the Bible and God expects the pastor whether he wants to or not to teach the whole counsel of God okay at some point we have to make our way through the books that we've not yet covered we have to dip into the things that we've not yet investigated we have to look at things that we've perhaps never looked at before because God says we need to understand the whole counsel and he expects the whole counsel to be taught as we live here in the new covenant we ought to recognize that God's promises haven't stopped they didn't stop with Jesus they were fulfilled in Jesus when Jesus said it is finished he did not mean right no more he meant that everything is yes and amen in him we get everything by virtue of belonging to Jesus and neither does it mean that we no longer have a responsibility we can just sit right if Jesus has done it all

[36 : 40] I don't have to do anything right well it's tempting to think that way but that would be a misunderstanding of what God has actually given you and so here you are kingdom people living in God's kingdom able to enjoy the promises and the reason I would encourage you to look back on the covenants that God has made is so that as you sit here or at home or wherever you might be you might be able to pray in a covenant way you might be able to take all the things that God has said and remind him and God will not be angry at you with for it because that is exactly what God did with Moses God says to Moses remind me of these things okay God is telling Moses what to pray and so that we may understand his character this is the confidence that we have about the future it's not about 50 50 no such thing the future is in the hands of

God as we look at Jesus and hear his sermon and watch him work he heals the blind restores the deaf to hearing he forgives he dies on the cross and we hear his teaching we are living in the day where we have heard the fulfillment of all the promises and this means that as we sit here this evening and as we go home that we are people of God's promise okay we are God's promise kept and look at the extent and the length God went to to make sure that he kept that promise Christ crucified amen may the grace of God remind you every day that you are his and you will forever be in Jesus name amen God God