

How the Bible fits together: Covenant (Part 2)

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[0:00] Well, as I said this morning, tonight we are reaching the final stage of the study that we have been working through on how the Bible fits together. We've been working through the diagram on the screen, looking at all of these wonderful themes that run through the Bible. As I've said many times, if you look at Genesis chapter 1 and 2 and Revelation chapter 21 and 22, you find the same things. And you also find that these things run right through the Bible. And today at both services we've been looking at the final theme, the wonderful theme of covenant. And as always we're asking the three questions, what happens in the Old Testament, what happens in the New Testament and what does it mean for us.

And so this morning we looked at the first part of that, what happened in the Old Testament. Because it's really, really important that we understand this concept of covenant, because it's at the absolute centre of the Bible's message. Now if you aren't here this morning, don't worry because we'll just do a two minute recap of what we looked at in order to make sure that we understand what we're talking about. First of all, the thing that we have to make sure is that we understand what we mean by covenant. And basically what a covenant means is a relationship of the deepest commitment. And so you have four basic elements to a covenant. There's the fact that there's a bond between two parties, two people, two groups, come together in a relationship. So there's a bond. Within that bond there are terms. And so there are expectations as to what is right, what is wrong. And so the covenant relationship is to be lived out according to what is stipulated in these terms. For those who adhere to those terms, there are blessings. And the blessings are wonderful in a covenant relationship. But if we abandon those terms and break them, then there are curses. And so there's these four elements, a bond with terms, which brings blessing or curses. That's just a very, very basic definition of covenant. And as we said this morning, marriage is an excellent example of it. Two people come together, there are terms within that relationship, which set out the nature of that relationship. There are blessings if you stick to it. There are curses and problems if you abandon it. And so God's relationship with us is a covenant relationship. And when you go back to Genesis one and two, you see that his relationship with humanity was a covenant. He entered into this bond with Adam.

God is God and Adam is his creation. Adam is his person, Adam and Eve are his people. And we have this bond, we have the terms of the bond to fulfill all that God required of him and also to not do the things that God had told him not to do. And there are blessings for obedience, curses for turning away from the covenant commitment. And of course, that's exactly what Adam did. He turned away from it. The rest of the Old Testament is about the restoration of that covenant relationship and what God did in order to bring a restoration of what was broken in the Garden of Eden. And as we said this morning, there are four big covenant moments and they are associated with four key Old Testament figures, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. And I'll just go through very quickly to remind us, Genesis nine, God makes a covenant with Noah. And as I said this morning, at the heart of that covenant is the land. God's covenant with Noah is all about creation. It's about the land. Then Genesis 12 to 24, God makes a covenant with Abraham. Then Abraham, fairness face, God said to behold, my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. So at the heart of the Abrahamic covenant is family. God is establishing his covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The next key moment is with Moses. And here God brings law into the covenant and he brings temple into the covenant. Exodus 34, 28, he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the 10 commandments. Leviticus 26, verse 11, I will make

my dwelling among you. That's temple language and it's law language from Exodus. And then finally, the fourth big covenant moment is with David. Verse three of San 89, you said, I've made a covenant with my chosen one. I've sworn to David, my servant, I will establish your offspring forever and build your throne for all generations. And what I think is amazing is that the themes that we have been looking at, the land, the family, the law, the temple, the kingdom, they all become part of this great overarching theme, the theme of covenant. God's covenant with Noah, his covenant with Abraham, his covenant with Moses, his covenant with David. It all fits together perfectly. God's plan is a very amazing plan. But the Old Testament message, whilst on the one hand it talks about God's covenant restoration, it is also an account of covenant failure, as we said, because the people of Israel repeatedly, despite the warnings from the prophets, turned away from God and abandoned his covenant. And as we said this morning, there is every reason for God to reach the end of the Old Testament and say, I have had it with my covenant. I am walking away. But that is not what God did at all. God did not abandon his covenant.

[6:36] God said, I have plans for a new covenant, for a better covenant. And of course, the new covenant is commonly known as the New Testament. But I think it would maybe be better called the New Covenant, because that is really what it is all about. And we read about that in Hebrews 9, for if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more with the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. So the Old Testament into the New Testament, the Old Testament, we have a lot of covenant emphasis in it, but when we come to the New Testament, instead of abandoning all that, God makes it better. God establishes a new covenant. So that's a five minute summary of this morning's sermon, emphasizing the fact that covenant is at the heart of God's plans, and we see that running through the Old Testament. If you read through the Old Testament, you will see the word covenant again and again and again and again. So that brings us to our second question. What happens in the New Testament in terms of covenant?

Well, a lot of people think that the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament is one of discontinuity, the idea that the New Testament is basically completely replacing the Old Testament. Everything in the Old Testament is being abandoned and thrown away, and the New Testament is a whole new idea that is replacing it. That's not true. There is a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, but the difference is not one of discontinuity. It is one of fulfillment. It is one of consummation. It is one whereby the Old Testament is the shadow and the New Testament is the reality. Sometimes the illustration has been given by some very, very skilled theologians who have described the Old Testament as imagining a room full of furniture, but there's hardly any lights on. And so you've got this room, it's full of furniture, but the light is dim. And so you can't see everything clearly. Everything is there, but you can't see it clearly. The New Testament is the same room, but with the lights turned on and you can see it all clearly. I think that's a very, very good illustration.

So the New Covenant is not a radical replacement of the Old Covenant. It is rather a fulfillment of the one plan, the one covenant of grace that God has got running through the whole Bible. The New Testament is the perfect realization of what was initially administered in the Old Testament. And we know this because the New Testament makes it very, very clear because it emphasizes from the very beginning that the coming, the death, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus are in fulfillment of what the Old Testament promised. And we can see many, many examples of that. For example, Zachariah, when he hears of John coming to prepare the way for the Messiah, he speaks of how this is to show the mercy promised to our Father and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our Father, David.

God has not forgotten his covenant. He's fulfilling it. Acts 3.25, you are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your Father, Saint to Abraham. And in you, in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And Galatians 3.13 is really, really clear. It says Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. And remember, curse is covenant language. For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a T so that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith. When you hear the word Abraham, you should be thinking covenant. Paul and Peter and Zachariah are telling us that everything that Jesus has done is in fulfillment of God's covenant. Jesus, the Persian and work of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment and is at the center of God's covenant promises.

That's why the New Testament says that Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant mediator, basically, especially the idea of somebody who, who stands in between two parties like a bridge. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. Now that's a phrase we have probably all heard many times. But what does it really mean? What does it really mean when we say Jesus is the mediator or Jesus is the bridge or the go between Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant? What does that mean? Well, to get the answer, the best place to go is to the letter of the Hebrews, letter to the Hebrews, because this is the, this is the letter that that that at its heart, as we said, has the message Jesus is better. And this covenant is better. It was being written to people who wanted to go back to the old covenant and the writer is saying Jesus is better and he's better for a variety of reasons. And we'll look at three examples that Hebrews emphasizes and what it teaches us about the new covenant.

[12:42] First of all, the new covenant is based on a better priesthood. Okay. So the New Testament compared to the Old Testament, both have a priesthood. The new one is better. And we're told this in Hebrews seven, this makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant for the former priests were many a number because they were prevented by death from continuing an office, but he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost, those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. Now notice what that is saying. The old priests of the old covenant died. They didn't live forever. They were all mortal men. And therefore they were not able to save anyone to the upper uttermost. They were not able to intercede for anybody permanently because they themselves were under the sentence of death. But Jesus, he can act as our priest forever because he always lives. He is resurrected to make intercession for you. Jesus's priesthood is permanent. And that means he is always, always able to intercede for us, always able to give us access to God, always there to be a mediator to act on our behalf. And so that's why our relationship with God is forever. It's not a temporary thing because now we have a better priesthood. The new covenant is also based on better promises.

Now, so we've been a longer reading, but I'm going to read it and let's just try and listen to what it says. Hebrews 8, this is again what we were reading earlier. But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better since it's enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. In other words, if the Old Testament was perfect, we wouldn't need the New Testament. But it's emphasizing that even the Old Testament itself was looking forward to a new one because it says from Varshate, for he finds fault with them when he says, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with the father, their father on the day they when I took them out of the took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, for they did not continue in my covenant. And so I showed no concern for them declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days declares the Lord. I will put my law into their minds and write them on their hearts.

And I will be their God, and they shall be my people, and they shall not teach each one his neighbor and each one his brother saying, no, the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to

the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more. Now that's really amazing because there's a lot of things that we could say, but if you look at it from the least to the greatest, do you think of Jesus as ministry? From the least person like the woman at the well, to the greatest like Nicodemus the Pharisee, they are all being given access to God through Jesus Christ.

It's not no longer is it just the prophets who know God. No longer is it just the scribes who know the law. No longer is it just the priests who are allowed to approach God to worship, but from the least to the greatest. Now I doubt many of you feel like you're the greatest, but I'm pretty sure you probably feel like you're the least, but you're still included. It's a better promise. It's not just the Old Testament prophets who know God. We will all, we all will know God through this new covenant and our sins will be totally forgiven. And so it's based on better promises. And the reason it's based, reason we have this better priesthood and this better, these better promises is because the new covenant is based on a better sacrifice. And this takes us into Hebrews chapter nine. So we've read from Hebrews seven about the priesthood, Hebrews eight about the promises, Hebrews nine about the sacrifice. And again, this is a wee bit of a longer reading. But again, just think about the whole idea comparing the Old Testament sacrifices with the new, the Old Covenant sacrifices with the new. Let's see what it says. When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. If the old covenant was good, how much more effective is this new covenant? Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant for where a will is involved, the death of the one who has made it must be established, for a will takes effect only at death since it's not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore, not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law that had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hissp and sprinkled the book itself and all the people, saying this is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you. And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship indeed under the law almost everything is purified with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

[19:56] Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rights but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands which are copies of the true things but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf nor was it to offer himself repeatedly as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is he has appeared once for all to the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Now that's an amazing passage because think about what that's saying it's comparing the old covenant and the new in the old covenant you had a priest who went into a holy place made with hands and there he had to repeatedly offer sacrifices. In the new covenant you have Jesus entering not a holy place in the middle of

Jerusalem in the temple but into heaven itself in the presence of God on our behalf and he's not offering the blood of goats and bulls that can never take away sin but he is offering his own blood and he himself is the sacrifice and because he is perfect the sacrifice is once for all and through that God is establishing a covenant relationship with his people that is eternal and that's why the new covenant is better by far. And so the letter to the Hebrews we've just kind of skimmed through it but it clearly emphasises the superiority of Jesus's covenantal work and again we could look at much more in the New Testament and

I wish we had time but we don't but what we can do is summarise everything that we have been saying. Remember what we said at the start you've got these four key covenant moments in the Old Testament Noah to do with the land, Abraham to do with the family, Moses to do with the law and the temple, David to do with the kingdom. These are the five four big covenant moments and they encompass the five great themes that we have been looking at but the New Testament teaches us that all of these are fulfilled where? In Jesus Christ and you can see that here Jesus is the son of David he is the Davidic king that that covenant points towards. Jesus is the temple, Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus is the one who fulfils the law of God perfectly with his active and passive obedience. Jesus is the one who opens up God's family to Jew and Gentile and Jesus is the one who will come again in power and who will make the new heavens and the new earth the whole land which is the inheritance of God's people. Every single covenant promise that these Old Testament events point to is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and ultimately Jesus is undoing everything that went wrong with Adam's covenant disobedience. The new covenant is bringing together all of these Old Testament covenant promises into one beautiful new better covenant that all revolves around Jesus. Everything that the New Old Testament points towards is being fulfilled in Christ and so Jesus has come to do a covenant work. He has come to fulfill all of that and to make it better to make it better by far no longer is the land just that we patch up the eastern end of the Mediterranean. It's the whole new heavens and the earth no longer is the family just Abraham's descendants. It is everybody who is called Jew and Gentile no longer is the law a burdensome ceremonial challenge for people to try and live by but it is a liberating thing that that shows us how to live in God's way. No longer is the temple a building in one location in the world it is now your heart and my heart and the kingdom of God is not a political entity called Israel it is a global and unbreakable kingdom with Christ on the throne and all of these things are part of Jesus's covenant work. But remember what we said in the morning a covenant is not just a relationship it is a matter of life and death. Hebrews emphasizes that no covenant is inaugurated without blood because it is so serious it is a matter of life and death and life and death is exactly what the new covenant meant for Jesus because making this covenant cost him his life. Jesus came to die a covenant making death because it was only through this death that all the promises of Jeremiah 31 and of Genesis 12 and of every other passage that we have read 2 Samuel 7 all these covenant passages it is only at the cross that these things are fulfilled.

Jesus came to die a covenant making death which is why after supper he took the cup and he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood because it is at the death of Jesus symbolized in the Lord's Supper it is there that this new covenant is made. There on the cross Jesus seals the new covenant there he fulfills all the terms all the requirements all the stipulations there he bears the curse of the broken covenant and through that cross we receive all of God's covenant blessings and through that death on the cross you and

[28:02] God can now have a covenant relationship that will last forever and that's why when we come to the very end of the Bible in Revelation 22 we read these words then the angel showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the land through the middle of the city of the city also on either side of the river the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month the leaves of the tree before the healing of the nations no longer will there be anything accursed but the throne of God and of the land will be in it and his servants will worship him and that immediately points their minds back to Eden because it sounds just like Eden doesn't exist river water leaves but notice what it says in verse 3 now in verse 3 the ESV gives a very literal translation no longer will there be anything accursed that's a very little translation the authorized version is not quite as literal but it's probably clearer because it says there shall be no more curse and I hope you can see the covenant language there at the beginning you had a covenant but a curse came in in Revelation 22 we have everything restored to the perfection of Eden and we have the promise there will be no more curse and that's because Jesus took the curse upon himself and you think of every way that your life has been affected by that curse and I should have said this before but think about how your life has been affected by that curse think of every way that you

have suffered physical pain in your body that is part of the curse you think of every time somebody has mistreated you that is part of the curse you think of every single thing you see wrong in this world that is all because of the curse and you think of all the agony that death brings to us all that is the curse manifesting itself and Jesus says when I return there will be no more curse and that's what you have to look forward to if you are trusting in Jesus this is where it's really interesting to compare the end of the Old Testament with the end of the New Testament at the end of the Old Testament as we said this morning the very last word is curse and there is that warning of curse if people continue to turn away but at the end of the New Testament for all those who trust in God you have this promise at last you think about it all through the pages of scripture we have been trying to get rid of that curse that curse has affected everything it has wrecked everything wrecked God's plans wrecked the world wrecked people's lives wrecked you and me and all through the pages of scripture we are trying to get rid of it and trying to get rid of it and then we come to the very last chapter and then we reach the climax when God says no more curse no more curse and that is why the new covenant is a better covenant it's an amazing covenant and so that's what happens in the New Testament Jesus fulfills

everything and he establishes this wonderful new covenant our last question whenever we have done one of these studies is what does it mean for us well I'm just going to say two things briefly this morning I emphasise that two words should always come into our mind we think of covenant consistency and commitment because when it comes to covenant God is consistent to his covenant and he is committed to it and that has much to teach us at a personal level first of all God is consistent that means when God makes you a promise he keeps it and the unchangeable character of God himself means that he will never break it God promises you something he will keep it that's why a verse like John 3 16 is a covenant statement for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life that's a promise that God will never break and that God will will apply with meticulous consistency whoever believes will not perish and there will be no exceptions to that it's a covenant promise God is making you a promise a promise that he will never ever fail to keep and that's why the response to God's covenant is always faith because faith just means this that you trust God's promise God is saying if you trust in me I will never fail you I'll never lie to you

I'll never leave you I'll never let the devil or anything else separate you from me and I will be your God and you will be mine forever God is saying that and all all he asks of us is to trust that promise that's all he asks that we would just trust him so God is consistent but that consistency is also a warning because God is consistent God cannot come to the day of judgment and then say for thousands and thousands of years I've been telling people that if they believe in me they will not perish but have everlasting life but now I've changed my mind and now anybody can have everlasting life God is not inconsistent like that and that's why if we are not trusting these things are the most urgent warning because God is

God is consistent he's a fair God he's a perfectly fair God and he's just asking for that and that's why we've got to make sure we're doing it and so the consistency of God is also a warning God is consistent but God is also committed because the amazing truth of the Bible is that God never gives up on his covenant promises I said this a bit this morning but I make no apology for saying it again the Old Testament God's people failed and they failed again and they failed again and they failed again but God never gave up he never gave up he was constantly calling them back and he willingly forgave them and his heart was always always always set towards his people the Old Testament reveals a God of incredible commitment but do you know that that was just the shadow in the Old Testament God patiently warned his people against the consequences of breaking the covenant and he lovingly called them back that's what he did in the Old Testament he was so committed to them but in the New

Testament we see that the shadow has come to a whole new level because God is not standing warning us in the New Testament and God is not standing calling us in the New Testament in the New Testament God himself is hanging on the cross carrying the covenant curse that you and I

should have no that is covenant commitment and that is what you mean to God you think of God the Son in glory looking upon a world that cannot save itself that's in a mess because of its covenant disobedience and you think of God the Father wanting to put that right and wanting to see a restoration and God the Son says I will lay aside my glory and I will go and I will obey the law of God and I will fulfill the covenant requirements and I will carry the covenant curse and I will do it even if it costs me my life covenant is a matter of life and death and God wants a covenant with you that is how much you mean to God and maybe God has brought you here tonight to hear that to hear that he has not given up on you but he is calling you and he is saying what is in the past is in the past I have a new and a better covenant for you and that's what sums that sums it up that I love you and I have given my only son that if you believe in me you will not perish but you'll have eternal life God does not give up on his covenant and that means that God has not given up on you so God is utterly committed and so that's us at the end of our study and I hope that the last few weeks have shown you that the Bible fits together perfectly and there are many more themes that run through the Bible we just looked at six of them but it's amazing how it all fits together but what I think is most amazing of all is that when you think of how the Bible fits together you see this amazing plan you see the theme of land running through it you see the theme of family running through it you see the theme of temple running through it you see the theme of law running through it you see the theme of kingdom running through it you see God's covenant running through it and God has created a masterpiece in this Bible an absolute masterpiece and do you know that he did all that for you because when we think of God's great plan and when we think of how the Bible fits together you are part of that plan and God wants you to hear this God wants you to hear about a promised land and he wants you to know about a beautiful

[41:04] family and a glorious temple and a perfect law and an unshakable kingdom and an everlasting covenant God wants you to know about all of that and God wants you to have it all don't ever think that Christianity is offering you a little and don't ever think that God's plans for you are small God well what does Paul say he does far more abundantly than we can ask or think all of this is for you and God is saying I want you to have it so what do you see let's pray