
Partnership and Promises

Victory Life Church

“Understanding the Covenants” (Sunday, February 10, 2019)

Introduction

Personal Relationship with God: we might define in terms of God being our friend, our teacher, or even our master. Though all of these are true and important, there is another facet to our relationship with God that is equally important, but has gotten little attention: God as our *partner*. (**Partnership**)

Backstory - Setup (Conflict)

Genesis 1-2 — God creates a good world, and appoints humanity as divine image-bearers to rule - have “dominion” (Genesis 1:26-28), which is to be in *partnership* with God (Tree of Life), executing His authority within His creation.

Genesis 1:28 (NLT) Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

Humans are tasked with spreading God’s goodness by caring for and cultivating the garden, trusting His knowledge of good and evil (Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil) instead of their own definitions of right and wrong (Genesis 2:15-17).

Genesis 3 — Humans make the decision to execute authority apart from God, by suspicion that leads to rebellion, *fracturing the relationship* and *breaking the partnership*, resulting in humanity being exiled from the garden into a world where work and family are as much burden as a blessing (Genesis 3). Scripture goes on to show it wasn’t just those individual human beings, but every human being tries to exercise their authority in rebellion, from a broken partnership and a fractured relationship (Genesis 4-11).

This is the Bible’s way of explaining why we live in a world of rebellion, corruption, injustice, and tragedy when we were made to cultivate a world of love, and beauty, and peace, and justice in partnership with God and His goodness. The Bible also tells the story of how God intends to resolve the issue of this broken relationship and partnership. He selects a smaller group of people out of the whole and forms a *NEW PARTNERSHIP* (relationship) with them. The Biblical word for this new partnership is “**COVENANT**.”

Covenants are a formal relationship between two parties who agree to a set of promises so they can work together toward a common goal. Covenants have obligations and commitments, but are different from contracts in that they are relational and personal (like marriage: husband and wife). In the covenants God makes, God makes certain promises, and in exchange He asks this group of humans to make certain commitments. Within these

promises and commitments, God will use this new partnership to *renew His partnership with everyone, which is intended to renew His good world.*

Backstory - 4 Covenants (Explanation)

Noah — Genesis 8:20-9:17

- After purging the world of humanity's evil, God makes a covenant with Noah and all creation, repeats the mandate for humanity (Genesis 1:28), which opens up a new future for God's good world based on his promises.

Genesis 9:7-11 (NLT) “Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth.” Then God told Noah and his sons, “I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, and with all the animals that were on the boat with you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals—every living creature on earth. Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth.”

- **God's Promise:** God promises that in spite of human's rebellion and evil, He will not destroy them or His world like this ever again. Instead, the earth will become a reliable place where God will work out his purposes to rescue everyone and everything. (Genesis 8:18-22 and 9:9-11)
- **Noah (and Creation's) Commitment:** Nothing. God asks *no commitment* from humanity in this covenant. He just states His promises and signs it with a rainbow. (Genesis 9:12-17)

Abraham — Genesis 12, 15, and 17

- God selects Abraham from among the nations scattered from Babylon (Genesis 11), and makes a promise to him that will eventually restore His blessing to all humanity.
- **God's Promise:** God promises to bless Abraham with a huge family and will inherit a promised piece of land in Canaan (Genesis 12:1-3, 6-7).

Genesis 12:1-3 (NLT) The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will **bless you** and make you famous, and you will **be a blessing to others**. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. **All the families on earth will be blessed through you.**”

Genesis 15:6 (NLT) And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted **him as righteous** because of his **faith**.

- **Abraham's Commitment:** Abraham is asked to respond to God's promise in a few different ways:
 1. Trust God's promises and follow Him wherever He leads. (Genesis 12:1, 15:1-6)
 2. Train up his family to do what is right and just by following God's commands. (Genesis 18:16-19)
 3. Circumcise all males in his family as a “sign of the covenant.” (Genesis 17) This is meant to be a symbol that this family's fertility and future lay in God's hands.

- God repeats His promises to Abraham and his descendants that through this family, somehow, He is going to bring His blessing upon all nations of the earth; this is *God's ultimate aim in blessing Abraham and his family: to bless the world*. (Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14)

Israel — Exodus 19-24 (Mosaic Covenant)

- God has just rescued Israel from brutal slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1-15) and promises to make them into “kingdom of priests” that He will use to reveal Himself to all nations.
- **God’s Promise:** God rescued them by His grace (asking nothing of them before delivering them from slavery, only that they trust Him), and promises to come and personally dwell in their midst and bring them into the land promised to Abraham (Exodus 3:7-20).
- **Israel’s Commitment:** Obedience to the terms of the covenant embodied in the laws given by God at Mount Sinai (including the 10 Commandments) (Exodus 20-23).

Exodus 19:3-6 (NLT) Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.’ This is the message you must give to the people of Israel.”

- God has chosen Israel as a covenant people to make them into a “priestly nation” (kingdom of priests) that will follow Him and so represent God’s character to all nations, which is one way He achieves His ultimate aim: *blessing the world*.

David — 2 Samuel 7 (Psalm 72, 89, and 132)

- God has chosen and established David as the king over Israel and promises that the promises to Abraham and Israel will be fulfilled in his royal lineage (1 Samuel 16 through 2 Samuel 6).
- **God’s Promise:** God promises that He will make David’s name great and keep Israel in the promised land, and after David dies He will raise up a descendant who will build a temple and a kingdom that will last forever (2 Samuel 7:8-16).
- **David’s Commitment:** David and his descendants must remain faithful to God and lead all of Israel in obedience to the laws of the covenant (Psalm 132:11-12).

2 Samuel 7:12-16 (NLT) “For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he sins, I will correct and discipline him with the rod, like any father would do. But my favor will not be taken from him as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from your sight. Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever.”

- God will use this future descendant of David to bring the Kingdom of God of justice and peace over all nations, achieving His ultimate goal: the blessing of Abraham may come to all people (Psalm 72:1-17).

The story of Israel in the promised land is told in the books of Joshua through 2 Kings and it tells the long story of how Israel failed at each of these partnerships, and their kings are unfaithful to the covenant made with David. It turns out that God's covenantal people were nothing but covenant-breakers. These failures ended in the consequences of refusing to keep the commitments of the covenant: exile in Babylon.

A New Covenant — Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:22-32

In the middle of all the disobedience and rebellion and failure, God was still speaking to His people and giving hope through the prophets of one day God still fulfilling all of His covenant promises and making a **“NEW COVENANT,”** a covenant that would completely restore all of the broken covenants that came before it and fulfill the ultimate goal of blessing all the nations.

Isaiah saw a future king from the line of David who will establish God's kingdom over all nations (Isaiah 9 and 11), and would bring God's “covenant of peace” (Isaiah 54:10, 55:3) and become a “light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1-7).

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NLT) “The day is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a **new covenant** with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the Lord. “But this is the **new covenant** I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the Lord. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the Lord.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the Lord. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

Ezekiel 36:22-27 (NLT) “Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign Lord: I am bringing you back, but **not because you deserve it**. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations. I will show how holy my great name is—the name on which you brought shame among the nations. And when I reveal **my holiness** through you **before their very eyes**, says the Sovereign Lord, then the nations will know that I am the Lord. For I will gather you up from all the nations and **bring you home again** to your land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a **new heart**, and I will put a **new spirit** in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put **my Spirit in you** so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

The anticipation of this new covenant pushes the story forward until you get to the end of the Old Testament wondering if God will keep His promises, will Israel ever obey fully, when will the king from the line of David come and set things right.

Jesus and the New Covenant People (Resolution)

This is where the New Testament begins and introduces us to Jesus. The Gospels all claim that Jesus is Israel's God become human (John 1:1-18) to fulfill both God's part and Israel's part of the Covenants. This becomes the backbone of the storyline of God's redemption. God preserved the world through Noah, initiated redemption through Abraham, formed a special people through Israel, promised a shepherd-king through David, and then fulfilled all of His covenantal promises through Jesus.

Matthew 1:1 (NLT) This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of **David** and of **Abraham**:

Jesus saw Himself as fulfilling these prophetic promises and called people to become part of the new covenant family. Jesus said his death would seal the new covenant and inaugurate God's kingdom and this new covenant people (Matthew 5-7, Luke 4:14-20, Luke 22:19-22).

Abraham - a Son of Abraham — Jesus lives by trust in the Father, even to the point of death, and teaches His new family of disciples to do what is just and right and so become a source of blessing for all nations (Matthew 4, 5-7, 28:18-20).

Israel - the True, Faithful Israelite — Jesus is the truly obedient Israelite who kept, fulfilled, and thus transcended the law of God, and empowers his followers to become truly obedient by following the leadership of His Spirit (Matthew 5:17-48, Romans 8:1-11).

David - the Son of David — Jesus is the royal son from the line of David who inaugurates God's kingdom in his life, death, and resurrection, and now sits at God's right hand reigning as shepherd-king over the earth and will continue to reign forever over the new creation. He promises that His Spirit will be present in and with His new covenant people to lead them into obedience (Matthew 1, Luke 1:26-38, Luke 24:36-48, Hebrews 8-10).

Luke 24:44-49 (NLT) Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things. "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven."

Jesus perfectly succeeded at every point humans failed, and even became the sacrifice for all of humanity's failures. This makes him the one who guarantees and mediates a new and better covenant (Hebrews 7:22, 9:15). And now, Jesus invites us into this new covenant community, not by keeping the covenant commitments perfectly, but by faith and trust in Jesus. This is grace.

Conclusion

Jesus' disciples, now being made up of all nations (not just Jews), are the family of Abraham, the new covenant people who follow the Spirit of Jesus (the Holy Spirit) into a life of freedom and blessing (Galatians 3:13-14, 23-29, 5:16-25).

Galatians 3:13-14, 27-29 (NLT) But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith... And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and **God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.**

Our sins and failures have been forgiven, we get new hearts and God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us, causing us to love God's laws and walk in His ways. We can do righteousness and justice, and so be the light of the world, a light to all nations. All because of Jesus.

Epilogue

The end of the story describes a new creation of God and man in partnership cultivating His goodness in all of creation where there once was devastation, corruption, and destruction.

Revelation 22:1-5 (TPT) Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, flowing with water clear as crystal, continuously pouring out from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The river was flowing in the middle of the street of the city, and on either side of the river was the Tree of Life, with its twelve kinds of ripe fruit according to each month of the year. The leaves of the Tree of Life are for the healing of the nations. And every curse will be broken and no longer exist, for the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there in the city. His loving servants will serve him; they will see constantly his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more. They will never need the light of the sun or a lamp, because the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign as kings forever and ever!