

An Introduction to

Covenant

Theology

A
Ruín and Redemption.com
Teaching Series

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Lesson 1 Outline: *An Introduction to the Covenants*

I. What is Covenant Theology?

*How would you describe the Bible in just a few sentences? What's the big picture of the Bible?

*The Bible is one beautiful story: A story about *ruin* and *redemption*.

*And the primary way the Bible tells the story of ruin and redemption is *through God's covenants*

II. Why Study Covenant Theology?

1. We can't fully understand THE SCRIPTURES apart from the covenants:

A) The covenants PERMEATE the Scriptures:

*This is true *numerically*: The word covenant appears over 300 times in the Bible!

*This is also true *thematically*: Every page in Scripture is related to God's covenantal dealings:

→ We can't understand Genesis apart from God's covenant with Abraham and his seed

→ We can't understand Exodus apart from the same covenant promises (Exodus 2:24)

→ We can't understand the rest of the Pentateuch apart from God's covenant at Sinai

→ In short: The concept of covenant is all over the Bible—so we need to understand it

B) The covenants STRUCTURE the Scriptures:

*God's covenants in Scripture are like the frame of a house; it's the framework God gives us

*God's covenants are the backdrop to every biblical doctrine as the Pacific Ocean is to its islands

*One way we see this truth is in the very names, *Old* and *New Testaments*:

HOW OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS IS REALLY OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

| HEBREW word for Covenant in original Old Testament | GREEK word for covenant translated from the Hebrew | LATIN word for covenant translated from the Greek | ENGLISH word for covenant translated from the Latin |
|---|---|--|--|
| <i>Berith</i> | <i>Diatheke</i> | <i>Testamentum</i> | <i>Testament</i> |

C) The covenants UNIFY the Scriptures:

*They show us how all Scripture fits together into one beautiful story

*Some Christians tend to think of the Old Testament as pre-Christian or even sub-Christian

*The covenants show us salvation was always *by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone*

2. We can't fully understand THE SAVIOR apart from the covenants:

*In the beginning of Luke, Gabriel tells Zacharias his son would be the forerunner of the Messiah

*Zacharias celebrates by referencing the covenant promises to Abraham and to David (1:68-74)

*Here we see that we can only properly understand the Messiah in light of God's covenant promises

3. We can't fully understand THE CROSS apart from the covenants:

*At the Last Supper, when Jesus wanted to explain the significance of His death, what did He say?

→ In Matthew 26:28: "This is My blood *of the covenant*" (this hearkens back to Exodus 24:8)

→ In Luke 22:20: "This cup. . .is *the new covenant* in My blood" (hearkens back to Jeremiah 31)

*Jesus is saying His death will bring to fulfillment the covenant realities Moses and Jeremiah foretold

4. We can't fully understand OUR SALVATION apart from the covenants:

*This is especially clear from what Paul says in Romans 2:12-21

*Here Paul says that our justification in Christ works exactly like our condemnation in Adam did

*The doctrine of justification is wholly covenantal; we can't understand our salvation apart from it

5. We can't fully understand THE SACRAMENTS apart from the covenants:

*The covenants are also how Scripture explains and deepens our understanding of the sacraments

→ *Baptism* has replaced circumcision, which was the sign of *God's covenant with Abraham*

→ *The Lord's Supper* has replaced Passover, given in the context of *God's covenant at Sinai*

*The sacraments function like Noah's rainbow—outward signs of God's covenantal promises

SUMMARY: So then, understanding the covenants is really something that's absolutely vital

III. What is a Covenant?

1. The ORIGIN of the word covenant:

A) The HEBREW WORD:

*The Hebrew word in the Old Testament for covenant is *berith*.

B) The GREEK TRANSLATION:

*The New Testament Greek translation of that word is *diatheke*:

*The normal Greek word for “covenant” was *suntheke*, but this word had problems:

→ *Suntheke* usually conveyed the idea of a *mutual* agreement between two *equal* parties.

→ So, *diatheke* was chosen instead in order to emphasize:

*The sovereign nature of God's covenant (God's covenant with us isn't “mutual”)

*The vast difference between the parties involved (it isn't between “equal parties”)

C) The ENGLISH ROOTS:

*The Greek *diatheke* was, in turn, translated into Latin in three different ways:

→ One way it was translated is *testamentum* (again, where we get the English “testament”)

→ Another way it was translated to Latin is *foedus* (where we get the English “federal”)

→ It was also translated into Latin as *pactum* (where we get the English word “pact”)

THREE ENGLISH WORDS THAT COME FROM THE GREEK WORD FOR COVENANT

| HEBREW word for covenant | GREEK word for covenant | LATIN words for covenant | ENGLISH words from the Latin |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| BERITH | DIATHEKE | <i>Testamentum</i> | Testament |
| | | <i>Foedus</i> | Federal |
| | | <i>Pactum</i> | Pact |

2. The TYPES of Biblical covenants:

*In Scripture, we can find *three different types* of covenants. There are: **A)** covenants men make with each other (human covenants); **B)** covenants God establishes with men (divine covenants), and **C)** covenants that God's people renew with the Lord (covenants of renewal). Let's look at each kind:

A) HUMAN COVENANTS:

*In Scripture, marriage is considered a sacred covenant (Malachi 2:14)

*Treaties between nations were also covenants in Scripture (Joshua 9:15)

*Laws and agreements between kings and their people were covenants (1 Kings 5:12)

*Binding contracts for business negotiations were covenants (Genesis 21:22-32)

*Personal commitments were also covenants (1 Samuel 20:12-17)

B) DIVINE COVENANTS:

*Throughout the Old Testament, we also the Lord binding himself in covenant to His people

*These are the covenants the Lord enters into with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel and David

*We're going to be devoting the bulk of our time to studying through these covenants together

C) COVENANTS OF RENEWAL:

*This is when God's people come together corporately to renew their relationship with the Lord

*We see examples in 2 Kings 11:17 (Jehoiada); 2 Chronicles 29:1ff (Hezekiah); and Ezra 10:1-5

*Here God's people are already in covenant with Him, but are seeking to *renew* their allegiance

3. The DEFINITION of a covenant:

*So, now we know the three different types of covenants in Scripture, but what actually *is* a covenant?

*Perhaps the best definition of a covenant is this: “a bond in blood, sovereignly administered.”

A) A BOND:

*A covenant is “an oath-bound commitment.” At the heart of a covenant is a solemn oath

*We see a covenant as the swearing of an oath in *Genesis 21:23-32* (Abraham and Abimelech)

*We see the connection between covenant and oath in *Genesis 26:28-31* (Isaac and Abimelech)

*And we see the same thing again in *Joshua 9:6,11,15,18* (Joshua and the Gibeonites)

*So, a covenant is an oath-bound commitment: Once you make a covenant, there's no going back

B) A Bond IN BLOOD:

*So, a covenant is an oath; but it's also more than that: A covenant is an oath bound in blood

*We can see this even in the Old Testament terminology: In Hebrew, you “cut” a covenant

*The refers to the covenant ceremony: animals were cut and you would walk between the pieces

*It was a self-maledictory oath: May this also happen to me if I don't make good on my promise

*We see examples of the covenant ceremony in *Jeremiah 34:1-22* and *Genesis 15:7-21*

| HEBREW VERB | ENGLISH TRANSLATION | EXAMPLE PASSAGES | SIGNIFICANCE |
|--------------|---|---|--|
| <i>karat</i> | To MAKE (<i>literally, to CUT</i>) a covenant | Gen.15:18; 21:27,32; 26:28; 31:44; Exod.24:8; 34:10; Deut.5:2; 2 Chron.21:7; Ps.89:3; Is.55:3; 61:8; Jer.31:31,32,33; 32:40; 34:13; Ezek.34:25; 37:26 | Seems to signify the <i>Inauguration</i> of a covenant |
| <i>qum</i> | To ESTABLISH or CONFIRM a covenant | Gen.6:18; 9:9,11,17; 17:7,19,21; Exod.6:4; Lev.26:9; Deut.8:18; Ezek.16:60,62 | Seems to signify the <i>Confirmation</i> of a covenant |
| <i>natan</i> | To GIVE a covenant | Genesis 9:12; 17:2; Numbers 25:12 | |

C) A Bond in Blood SOVEREIGNLY ADMINISTERED:

*When it comes to divine covenants, we need to also add covenants are sovereignly administered:

→ This means, first of all, that *it's God alone who initiates His covenant with man:*

*We see this in God's covenant with *Noah* (Genesis 6:18)

*We also see it in God's covenant with *Abraham* (Genesis 12:1-3)

*God is the one who initiates this covenant with man, not the other way around

→ This means, secondly, that *it's God alone who sets the terms of His covenant with man:*

*With Noah, God didn't ask for suggestions; He said: "This is how it's going to be"

*With Abraham, God is the one who dictates both the requirements and promises

4. The ELEMENTS of biblical covenants:

*In a wedding, the oath is the central component. But there are also other elements as well

*Usually you also have a marriage ceremony, as well as covenant signs (rings), and a covenant meal

*We also see these elements included in the making of covenants in Scripture:

A) A covenant was at times accompanied by a covenant CEREMONY:

*We saw this described already in *Genesis 15* and *Jeremiah 34* with the cutting of the animals

*This covenant ceremony was a reminder of what the oath really was: An oath bound in blood

B) A covenant was often accompanied by a covenant MEAL:

*We see an example of this in *Genesis 26* with the meal between Abimelech and Isaac

*Another example is in *Genesis 31* in the meal between Jacob and Laban (and their kin)

C) A covenant could be accompanied by a covenant SIGN:

*We see examples of this in *human covenants*:

→ *Abraham* sets aside seven ewe lambs in his covenant with Abimelech (Genesis 21)

→ *Jacob* gathers stones into a heap as a witness of the covenant with Laban (Genesis 31)

→ *Joshua* sets up a large stone as a witness of the covenant with Israel (Joshua 24)

*We see examples of this also in *divine covenants*:

→ In Genesis 9, the rainbow is given as the sign of *God's covenant with Noah*

→ In Genesis 17, circumcision is given as the sign of *God's covenant with Abraham*

→ In Exodus 31, it seems the Sabbath is the sign of *God's covenant with Israel* (vv12ff)

*What is the function of these signs in divine covenants?

→ Covenant signs are meant *to give assurance to God's people*:

*The rainbow was meant to remind Noah and his sons of God's promise to them

*So too, baptism and the Lord's supper are visible pictures of God's promises to us

→ Covenant signs are also meant *to exhibit consecration to the world*:

*When Abraham received circumcision, it forever marked him as a man set apart

*Baptism is a mark of allegiance; the Lord's Supper proclaims Christ (1 Cor.11:16)

SUMMARY:

*So again, these are the primarily elements that were involved in the making of a covenant

*But though covenants could include all these elements, it wasn't necessary all these be present

IV. An Overview of Covenant Theology

1. The Covenant of WORKS:

*The Covenant of Works refers to the covenant relationship between God and Adam in Genesis 1-2

*God gave Adam a command in Genesis 2:16-17: Not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the garden

*Adam's obedience would have meant life, but his disobedience would result in death

*It's called the Covenant of Works because it was *a covenantal relationship* based on *Adam's works*

*Adam was also a covenant representative for all humanity (Rom.5): His sin brought ruin to us all

2. The Covenant of GRACE:

*After Adam sinned, God drew near and entered into a very different kind of covenant with Adam

*In the Covenant of Grace, God enters into covenant with *fallen man* that's based on *divine grace*

*Genesis 3:15 contains the first promise of the Savior: the woman's seed would crush the snake

**Ruin* had come to us all through one man—*Redemption* would come through Another

*God continues to expand on this promise in His covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel and David

*The Covenant of Grace is really just another name for the gospel

*In the Covenant of Grace, God redeems sinners *by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone*

3. The Covenant of REDEMPTION:

*The Covenant of Grace indeed comes after the Covenant of Works chronologically

*But Scripture makes clear God's plan of salvation was set in place long before the world's creation

*From all eternity, the Lord constructed a plan to redeem individuals among Adam's fallen race

*This rescue plan formed between the members of the Trinity is called the Covenant of Redemption

A) Where we see it in Scripture:

*Scripture says God's plan to redeem a people for himself was set before the world's foundation:

→ We see this in passages such as Ephesians 1:3-4; 3:9-11; 2 Timothy 1:9

*The Father commissioned the Son with a special task; accomplishing redemption for his people:

→ We see this in passages such as John 6:33; 10:18; and 17:4

*The Father promised to give the Son those people whom He was sent to redeem:

→ We see this in passages such as Psalm 2:7-8; John 6:39; and John 17:6

*To Summarize:

→ Before the foundation of the world, God had constructed a plan of salvation:

→ The Father set apart particular individuals to redeem for himself from every nation

→ The Father would send the Son into the world for them; the Son would lay down His life for them; and the Spirit would draw them to the Son according to the Father's promise

→ The *Covenant of Redemption* is thus God's plan to redeem a people for himself

→ The *Covenant of Grace* is then this plan actually being put into action in “real time”

B) What's clear and what's not as clear:

*What's clear: God constructed this plan of salvation before the world's foundation

*What's not clear:

1) Can/should we call this plan of salvation a “covenant”?

2) How the Covenant of Redemption relates to the Covenant of Grace more specifically:

** Some take the Covenant of Redemption as distinct from the Covenant of Grace:*

→ Saying the Covenant of Redemption was between persons of the Trinity

→ Whereas the Covenant of Grace is made between God and man

** Others take the Covenant of Redemption as being part of the Covenant of Grace:*

→ Saying the Covenant of Redemption is Jesus' task as head/representative

→ IE: As the Covenant of Works was made with Adam, and in and through him extended also to his posterity, so too, the Covenant of Grace is made with Christ as the head of all who belong to Him

TWO VIEWS OF THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION AND THE COVENANT OF GRACE

| | THEIR ESSENCE | COVENANT OF REDEMPTION | COVENANT OF GRACE |
|------------|---------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| SOME SAY | Two distinct covenants | Made between the Father and the Son | Made between God and elect sinners |
| OTHERS SAY | One and the same covenant | Made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him all those He represented | |

C) Why this matters for us as Christians:

*The Covenant of Redemption shows us our security in Christ:

→ Our salvation doesn't depend on us but on a promise the Father made to the Son

*The Covenant of Redemption shows us God's love for us in Christ:

→ God loved us knowing full well all the sins you would ever commit

*The Covenant of Redemption brings us back to the Great Commission:

→ God's rescue mission is still happening, and we're called to be part of it (John 20:21)

→ And we can go with confidence, knowing God has promised a people to the Son

V. An Introduction to the Covenant of Grace

1. The STAGES of the Covenant of Grace:

A) The Inauguration of the Covenant of Grace (Genesis 3:15):

*The first promise we're given in Scripture of a redeemer who would come to save God's people

*All the successive divine covenants in Scripture built upon this first promise in the garden

B) The Noahic Covenant (Genesis 6,9):

*In this covenant we learn more about this redeemer and the salvation He would accomplish

*Noah himself and his ark teach us about Christ and the gospel primarily through pictures

C) The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12,15,17):

*In the covenant with Abraham, we're pointed to Jesus and the gospel primarily through promises

*God's promises of a land, a seed, and blessing are ultimately fulfilled in Christ

D) The Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 20-24):

*We learn more about Jesus and the gospel in this covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai

*We see Christ through God's redeeming Israel from Egypt, the manna, sacrifices and tabernacle

E) The Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89):

*God promises to raise up one of David's descendants to sit on his throne and reign forever

*These promises of seed and throne find their true fulfillment only in Christ, the Son of David

F) The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31 and Luke 22:20, etc):

*In the new covenant, we have the ultimate fulfillment of everything that has gone before

*Now, the pictures become reality, the shadows take their substance, the promises find fulfillment

*Jesus came as the fulfillment of God's promise to accomplish redemption for His people

2. The UNITY of the Covenant of Grace:

*So, there are many manifestations, but they're all part of the one over-arching Covenant of Grace

*These manifestations don't replace or nullify each other but are unified and build on each other

A) Scripture ties together the manifestations of the Covenant of Grace LINGUISTICALLY:

*Though there are many manifestations, Scripture speaks of God's covenant in the singular tense:

→ Psalm 25:14; Psalm 74:20; Psalm 111:5,9

*Further, the same phrase, "My covenant", is used to describe each successive manifestation:

→ Noah (Gen.6:18;9:9ff); Abraham (Gen.17:2-21); Israel (Ex.19:5); David (Ps.89:28ff)

→ After Adam fell in Eden, there's just one covenant to speak of: the Covenant of Grace

B) Scripture ties together the manifestations of the Covenant of Grace HISTORICALLY:

*There's a historical unity between the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants:

→ The reason God sent Moses to deliver Israel was His promise to Abraham (Ex.2:24)

→ When Israel rebels, Moses appeals to the covenant promise to Abraham (Ex.32:13)

*There's a historical unity between the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants:

→ God identifies himself to David as He who brought up Israel from Egypt (2Sam.7:6)

→ David's death-bed charge to his son is all about keeping the Law of Moses (1 Kings 2:3)

*There's a fundamental unity between the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants:

→ In speaking of the Christ, Zacharias binds together Abrahamic and Davidic (Lk.1:68ff)

*Indeed, all the Old Testament manifestations of the Covenant of Grace are fulfilled in Christ:

→ Ezekiel 37:24-28 binds the Davidic, Mosaic, and Abrahamic with the New Covenant

C) Scripture ties together the manifestations of the Covenant of Grace THEMATICALLY:

*There's one phrase that we see repeated throughout God's covenantal dealings with His people:

→ “I will be their God, and they will be My people. . .”

*We see it in God's covenants with Abraham (Gen.17:7); Israel (Ex.6:6f) and David (Ezek.34:23f)

*This is the essence and goal of God's covenant; that He be our God and we be His people

3. The PROGRESSION of the Covenant of Grace:

*So, there's unity between the various stages of the Covenant of Grace—but there's also a progression

*In each successive stage, we come to learn more and more about Christ and about the gospel

A) A seed growing into a tree:

*God's plan unfolds through Scripture as a seed gradually and progressively grows into a tree

*It's the same tree from the very beginning, but with each stage the gospel unfolds more and more

B) A musical symphony:

*Each stage in the Covenant of Grace is like another track in the masterpiece of redemption

*As the instruments of a symphony build upon each other, so it is in the Covenant of Grace

4. The DYNAMICS of the Covenant of Grace:

*If all the OT stages of the Covenant of Grace are about Jesus, why is it sometimes hard to see Him?

*Because they whisper Him softly; through pictures and types; they're like shadows and reflections

*Each OT stage contains the temporal as well as the eternal (like a kernel of rice in the husk)

*God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel and David are all about Jesus and the gospel

*But they teach us about Him through the outward husk of various temporal pictures and promises

5. The ESSENCE of the Covenant of Grace:

*They're all wrapped with an outward husk—but the inner kernel is indeed the gospel

*The heart of the Covenant of Grace is that God saves sinners by grace through faith in Christ alone

*God's OT people looked ahead to Him; now, we look back; but salvation has always been the same

6. The REQUIREMENTS of the Covenant of Grace:

*Scripture tells us the gospel has no conditions—but it does have requirements:

→ Righteousness (Matt.5:20); the new birth (Jn.3:3,5); faith and repentance (Heb.11:6; Lk.13:3,5)

*But the wonderful thing is that God provides all that He requires in the Covenant of Grace:

→ Righteousness (Jer.33:16); new heart (Deut.30:6); faith and repentance (Acts 5:31; 2Tim.2:25)

7. The NAMES of the Covenant of Grace:

*The phrase “Covenant of Grace” is helpful to describe God's covenant but isn't actually in Scripture

*Rather, when the Bible itself speaks of the Covenant of Grace, it usually uses these terms:

A) My covenant (Genesis 6:18; 9:9-15; 17:2-21; Exodus 19:5; Psalm 89:28,34):

*Reminds us of the **AUTHOR** of the Covenant of Grace:

→ It's not a covenant we make with God, but that God makes with us

B) My covenant of peace (Isaiah 54:10; Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26):

*Reminds us of the **NATURE** of the Covenant of Grace:

→ It's called a covenant of peace because it results in peace with God (Col.1:19-20)

C) The everlasting covenant (Gen.9:16; 17:7-19; Ps.105:10; Is.24:5; 55:3; Jer.32:40; Ez.16:60; 37:26):

*Reminds us of the **DURATION** of the Covenant of Grace:

→ When the Lord enters into covenant relationship with someone, it's forever (Is.45:17)