

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 16 – COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS]

Up to this point in our story, things have gone downhill for humanity after our rejection of a relationship with God.

- ◆ We see the dark side of man's nature exposed for all its ugliness.
- ◆ We had the tragic events in the Garden.
- ◆ Cain murdering his brother Abel.
- ◆ The decent into anarchy of the pre-flood society and their destruction.
- ◆ The rebellion at the Tower of Babel on the Plains of Shinar and the confusion of the languages.
- ◆ God's contact with mankind through this period has been with a few select individuals.

However, now at this point, we see God taking an important step to restore the broken relationship in response to His creation's "no."

- ◆ He chooses a nomad called Abram and promised him that he would be the father of a great people if he did as God told him.
- ◆ ***Genesis 12:1 The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."***
- ◆ First thing we should notice about the story of Abram is, it is God who takes the initiative.
- ◆ This is a God who doesn't wait around moping, waiting for humanity to show some sort of contrition before he responds.
- ◆ Throughout his dealing with humanity's redemption, it is God who always takes the initiative.
- ◆ ***Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***
- ◆ What we see is a God who loves his children so much he takes the initiative even though He is the one wronged and is best characterised by the New Testament phrase, "the good shepherd goes searching for the lost sheep" (Luke 15:1-7).

God makes two important promises to Abram.

- ◆ ***Genesis 12:2-3 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."***
- ◆ The first is, he would become the father of a great nation.
- ◆ The great nation refers to what would later become the Hebrew nation, otherwise known as the Israelite or the Jewish nation.
- ◆ Abram is referred to as being a Hebrew in Genesis 14:13.
- ◆ More importantly though is the second promise made to Abram, that through him, "***all peoples on earth will be blessed.***"
- ◆ This promise, made some 1500 years before this promise became a reality, is much more inclusive and is a spiritual promise the benefits of which would be to all the families of the earth.
- ◆ God's promise was referring to that distant descendant of Abram, Jesus Christ whose sacrifice for the sins of the world would be a blessing to all mankind (John 3:16).
- ◆ To be able to engineer events hundreds of years before they actually come to fruition is testimony to God's design behind the passage of history and His commitment to fulfil His intended purpose.
- ◆ God sealed these two promises by ratifying a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15) and it was reaffirmed in Genesis 17.

Discussion on Covenants.

- ◆ Covenants play a central role in the biblical story of salvation.
- ◆ It is through the use of covenants that God re-establishes contact with humanity with the intent of reconciling the two alienated parties and establishing His kingdom within estranged humanity.
- ◆ In much the same way a marriage agreement or covenant is used to bind together a bride and groom, it is the instrument used to bind two parties together in a union, in this case, God and Abraham.
- ◆ The issue at the centre of both the marriage covenant and the various covenants God initiates with humanity is faithfulness (Malachi 2:14).
- ◆ As we saw earlier, it was a lack of faith or trust in their Creator and Father which led humanity into sin, so these covenant agreements were designed to lead people back to trusting their God.

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- ◆ The other important theme that permeates all of God's covenants with mankind is the issue of God's grace (Deuteronomy 9:5-6).
- ◆ It reaches its glorious culmination with the shedding of Christ's blood that initiated the New Covenant of grace.
- ◆ Reconciliation between the two parties simply could not happen if it were not for the grace of God as humanity could not from his side free himself from the penalty of sin, spiritual death.

In addition, each party to the covenant promises to fulfil specific conditions or obligations they have agreed to in advance.

- ◆ We will look at seven of these conditions that make up a covenant.
- ◆ 1) The parties involved.
- ◆ 2) The type of covenant, conditional or unconditional (Did man have to do anything to initiate the covenant?).
- ◆ 3) Blessings or promise associated with the covenant, temporal (pertaining to this life) or eternal (life to come).
- ◆ 4) Entry into the covenant.
- ◆ 5) Sign of the covenant.
- ◆ 6) Status of covenant, in effect or terminated.
- ◆ 7) Dietary conditions, open or restricted.

The first recorded covenant is the one with Noah after the flood.

- ◆ ***Genesis 9:8-17 Then God told Noah and his sons, 9 "I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, 10 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. 11 Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth." 12 Then God said, "I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. 13 I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. 14 When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, 15 and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. 16 When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth." 17 Then God said to Noah, "Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth."***
- ◆ This section of scripture gives us the answers to most of these seven conditions.

Covenant between God and Noah. (See chart below).

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Covenants Between God and Man

	Noah Gen 9:8-17	Abraham Gen 12:1-3 Gen 17:1-22	Moses Ex 19:3-8, Deut 4:1-14, Deut 5:1-32	Jesus Jer 31:31-34, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor 11:23- 26, 2 Cor 3:1-17, Heb 1- 10
Parties to Covenant	God/Noah, descendants, every living creature (Gen 9:8-10)			
Type of Covenant Conditional/ Unconditional	Unconditional Man didn't have to do anything			
Type of Blessing (Promise) Temporal/Eternal	Temporal – no more floods (Gen 9:11)			
Entry into Covenant	No Condition			
Signs of Covenant	Rainbow (Gen 9:12-16)			
Status of Covenant Still in effect or terminated	In Effect (Gen 9:11, 15-16)			
Dietary Conditions	All food – no restrictions (Gen 9:3)			
Additional Comments				

Let me ask a very important question.

- ◆ When we look at this covenant, what was the main point of the agreement?
- ◆ Think of it this way. Put yourself in the shoes of someone who had just witnessed the annihilation of mankind.
- ◆ What would be your number one concern? That it would never happen again, right?
- ◆ The most important thing about the covenant was the promise God made that it would never happen again.
- ◆ We will see that God’s promise is the most important aspect of each of the covenants.

Covenant between God and Abraham. (See chart below).

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Parties to Covenant	God/Noah, descendants, every living creature (Gen 9:8-10)	God/Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:7)		
Type of Covenant Conditional/ Unconditional	Unconditional – Man didn’t have to do anything	Conditional - on Faith (Gen 15:6, Rom 4, Gal 3:6-9)		
Type of Blessing (Promise) Temporal/Eternal	Temporal – no more floods (Gen 9:11)	Temporal and Eternal – “Great Nation” and “All nations blessed through you” – referring to Jesus (Gen 12:1-3)		
Entry into Covenant	No Condition	Faith (Gen 15:6)		
Signs of Covenant	Rainbow (Gen 9:12-16)	Circumcision (Gen 17:11)		
Status of Covenant Still in effect or terminated	In Effect (Gen 9:11, 15-16)	In Effect (Gen 17:7)		
Dietary Conditions	All food – no restrictions (Gen 9:3)	No change		
Additional Comments		Foreshadowed the New Covenant (Gal 3:29)		

Let’s ask that very important question again.

- ◆ What was the main point of the agreement?
- ◆ If you were Abraham, what was important to him?
- ◆ Again it was the promise made by God, the third line in our diagram, “Great Nation” and “All nations blessed through you.”
- ◆ In another important precedent, what did Abraham have to do to enter into the covenant? Just believe God’s promise, in other words, faith, or trust God at His word.
- ◆ This goes back to our lack of trust displayed in the Garden when we rejected our Creator and Father.
- ◆ Abraham became the father of the faithful because of his willingness to trust God at His word (Romans 4:16).

God’s Covenant with Abraham was reaffirmed with Abraham’s descendants, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 17:19; Exodus 2:24; Leviticus 26:42).

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- ◆ Things quietly bubble along for another 400 years or so in which time through some cunning manoeuvring by Jacob's children, the descendants of Abraham end up in Egypt as slaves.
- Now we are introduced to another important biblical principle, the principle of "archetypes" or "prototypes."***
- ◆ We will see events occurring in the history of Israel that are prototypes of more important events to occur later in the story of redemption.
 - ◆ The bible doesn't exactly use that term. It uses terms like, "shadow" and "reality" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 10:1).
 - ◆ ***Colossians 2:17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.***
 - ◆ For example, the events surrounding the exodus of the Israelites being delivered out of Egypt are concepts and prototypes which will be used to help us understand the role of the Messiah who was to come hundreds of years later.
 - ◆ For instance, symbols associated with the story of the Passover are terms that are used much later to describe the promised Messiah.
 - ◆ The spilt blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts signalled the death angel to "Passover" that dwelling place inhabited by Israelites.
 - ◆ The Lamb of God had to be sacrificed to allow God the option of "passing over" the sins of the world (John 1:29) and introduced God's concept of "grace" (Romans 5:15).
 - ◆ The unleavened bread and the wine consumed by the Israelites with the cooked Passover lamb signified the body and the blood of the slain Messiah given for the redemption of the world.
 - ◆ Another prototype is the theme of sacrifice that began back in the Garden (Genesis 3:21).
 - ◆ It is graphically portrayed here in the Passover events, the sacrificial system introduced as part of the Mosaic Covenant and the final culmination in the sacrifice of the Son of God for the sins of the world.
 - ◆ These events cast a long shadow into the future that eventually would result in the "shadow caster," Jesus Christ releasing humanity from the bondage of sin.
 - ◆ The Old Covenant looks forward in anticipation, while the New Covenant looks back in fulfilment.
 - ◆ Or to look at it from God's perspective of eternal time, the shadow was cast backwards to these events from the glorious light of grace from the Man on the cross, slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).
 - ◆ When we get to the New Covenant we will see the shadow completely disappears in the intense light of God's grace toward humanity (John 1:14; 12:46-47).
- This is one of the amazing aspects of the Bible.***
- ◆ To see these themes and concepts repeated throughout the scriptural record over a period of a thousand years by different authors is testimony to God's purpose and design underpinning scripture.
 - ◆ So as we look at the circumstances leading up to the covenant delivered to Moses at Mt. Sinai what we begin to see is a framework being carefully constructed to prepare us for the redeeming work of the Saviour of Israel and the entire world.
 - ◆ Some have even described the Mosaic Covenant as the womb for the birth of the Messiah.