

God's Covenants II Four Components of a Covenant

Michael Heiss—September 28, 2013

Good morning, everyone! Always a pleasure to be with you! I want to discuss with you what is, to me, a most fascinating subject: *covenants!*

We all know about Old Covenant and New Covenant. In the Bible God made many covenants, and people made many covenants. I'm going to give you a brief synopsis of what we did in part 1: *Covenants—Word Study*.

Fred pointed out that covenant comes from the Hebrew word 'beriyt'—an arrangement. It's an agreement, a pact, a league, a treaty—if you have two different nations—and it's an arrangement or agreement to either:

1. do something
2. not to do something

—whatever that something happens to be.

In addition to that, every time God makes a covenant there is *grace* involved. God is gracious! He deals with humans; He talks with them; He actually listens to them. Moses said, 'Oh, if I have found grace in Thy sight, carry us up to the land.' God said, 'I've heard you!'

When God says that He has heard you, you know you have found *grace* in the sight of God. Abraham found grace! David found grace! In fact, *we've all found grace!*

Secondly, He promises; every covenant has promises. Sometimes they're synonymous. A promise can mean a covenant or it can just mean a promise. But every time God makes a covenant, there are promises in that covenant.

In addition to that, we covered three covenants:

1. Noah and the Flood

After the Flood God gave His covenant. He gave it to Noah and his descendants; He gave it to every living creature and the earth. I remember reading that many times, asking myself: Why would God say, 'I make My covenant with every living creature'? Why would God say He makes His covenant with the earth—rocks, sand, dirt, water? It finally dawned on me. **God created it all!** What God creates, He's responsible for and He feels that He needs to take care of it.

Remember there was a garden in Eden, and God placed a man in there. What's the first thing

that He said to that man? *Dress it and keep it!* God wants His garden dressed and properly kept. He wants the earth running properly.

That is why He made the covenant with not only Noah, but every living creature in the earth, because all the earth is His!

2. Hosea

Hosea 2 says that God is going to make a covenant with the animals for the benefit of man. That we saw that it probably referred to the coming Millennium, when God is going to work out His will. He's going to change the nature of animals, and we're going to have a whole new ecological system.

Don't ask me how He's going to do it; what method He's going to use. But if a wolf, a lamb and child are going to be together, and the child is going to be able to put his hand on an asp's hole and not get bitten, you know there's going to be a change in the animals.

Animals don't understand that. When God made His covenant with the animals in the days of Noah, they didn't know that. Take a look at a cow sometime and you see this blank stare in its face; the cow doesn't know anything. Yet, God says, 'You're My cow! You're My lion! You're My elephant! I made you!'

3. David

Then we saw God's covenant with David and you can find that in the book of Jeremiah and in Psalm 89, especially, where God makes a promise to David that David would always have someone to sit on the throne. God says, 'You cannot break My covenant with David.'

That's where we left it. This morning we are going to look, not just at a specific covenant that God made with people, but we're going to look at the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai. They call it the Old Covenant. There are four steps to a covenant, or four component parts:

I. Terms of a Covenant

What were the terms of God's Covenant? We're going to become almost experts in Exo. 19 and 24; at least certain sections of those chapters.

Exodus 19:3: "And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain,

saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, **and keep My covenant**... [of course, he doesn't know what the covenant is, yet] ...then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a Holy nation." These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel'" (vs 3-6).

Then the rest of the chapter is in preparation for God coming down. He utters the Ten Commandments, gives the judgments (Exo. 20-23).

Exodus 24:1: "And He said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the LORD, but they shall not come near. Neither shall the people go up with him.' And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments...." (vs 1-3). What were those judgments? *The prior three chapters—21-23—of Exodus!*

"...And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words which the LORD has said, we will do.' And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning..." (vs 3-4).

- What were the terms of the covenant?
 - ✓ *listen to the words of God*
 - ✓ *obey them!*
- What did the covenant entail?

Let's see what that covenant was. We are going to see that that covenant was a very short covenant in terms of total words.

Deuteronomy 4:9—this is Moses advising, warning, the people of Israel: "Only take heed to yourself and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things, which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. But teach them to your children, and your children's children, to remember the day that you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb... [another name for Sinai] ...when the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will make them hear My words...' (vs 9-10)—the Ten Commandments; the only words that God spoke to the nation as a whole; the rest God gave to Moses who wrote them and gave them to Israel.

"...so that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and they may teach their children.' And you came near and stood at

the bottom of the mountain. And the mountain burned with fire up to the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the voice of the words, but saw no likeness, only a voice. And He declared to you **His covenant** which He commanded you to perform, *even the Ten Commandments*. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone" (vs 10-13).

What was the gist of that covenant? *His ten words; His ten rules; the Ten Commandments!* Now, there was a little more to it, that's true, but God tells us that the heart and core of the covenant was the Ten Commandments. These commandments, of course, had been in effect for generations going back, but now God is codifying them. He says, 'This is My covenant.' We'll see further confirmation of this, and we will truly see how few words were in this covenant that was ratified at Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 34:27: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words for yourself... [What words? *He just got through with the judgments!* Moses is writing down the judgments found in Exo. 21-23.] ...for in accordance to these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments" (vs 27-28). God is repeating Himself. Again, the covenant is the Ten Commandments, plus expounding in Exo. 21-23.

You've heard me say before, I'm in the Income Tax business and deal with the Internal Revenue Code. The Code you can hold in one hand, it's not that big. But the code doesn't tell you a lot. It gives you broad principles, but how do you apply it all? So, you've got these Treasury Regulations, Revenue Rulings, Revenue Procedures; you've got a whole library of books, but the heart and core of the law is in the code, which you can hold in one hand.

Likewise, we're going to see that the covenant that was ratified was only the Ten Commandments and the judgments (Exo. 20-23). That's it! To show you that it can be that small, I have a little book here and see if you can read what is on this: *The Constitution of the United States*. In here is the Declaration of Independence and the entirety of the Constitution of the United States. This is it! You can go into the Federal Registry and you can go to the title codes, and you will find a mammoth library of books. But this is the Constitution!

Likewise, the equivalent of four or five pages of printed words in the Ten Commandments

constituted the covenant at Sinai. Later, God added to that in the Book of the Law. We will see what constituted the Book of the Law. I want us to all look, read and understand this covenant; what it entails.

Exodus 24:3: “And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said, we will do.’ And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD...” (vs 3-4).

Verse 7: “And he took the Book of the Covenant... [Exo. 21-23; what else was written at that point? *Nothing!* Just the Ten Commandments.] ...and read in the ears of the people.... [They had Exo. 21-23 read to them.] ...And they said, ‘All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.’”

So, the terms of the covenant are:

- obey My voice
- obey My Ten Commandments
- obey My judgments

So, step #1 is the terms of the covenant

II. Agreeing to the Terms

Verse 7: “And he took the Book of the Covenant, and read in the ears of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.’” Step #2 is that you have to accept the terms. God accepted the terms; He offered them. He’s got to make sure that Israel is going to accept the terms, because if Israel does not accept the terms there is no covenant—*can’t be!*

Deuteronomy 5:22—this is right after God rehearsed the Ten Commandments; Moses is rehearsing them. “The LORD spoke these words to all your assembly in the mountain out of the midst of the fire of the cloud and of the thick darkness with a great voice. And He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and delivered them to me. And it came to pass when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, for the mountain burned with fire, you came near me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders, and you said, ‘Behold, the LORD our God has revealed His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire. We have seen today that God talks with man, yet, he [man] *still* lives. Now, therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die. For who of all flesh has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we *have*, and lived?’” (vs 22-26).

Grace! God would talk to people out the midst of a fire and they would live! This is *grace*; it really is!

Verse 27: “You go near and hear all that the LORD our God shall say. And you speak to us all that the LORD our God shall speak to you, and we will hear *it*, and do *it*.” They’re agreeing to the terms of the covenant.

Verse 28: “And the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me. And the LORD said to me, “**I have heard the voice of the words of this people...** [God heard! God’s grace; He listened!] ...which they have spoken to you. They have well *said* all that they have spoken.”

Here comes the problem that is trip up Israel for the rest of its days, v 29: “Oh, that there were such a heart in them that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always...” We know they didn’t. But at any rate, at that point they accepted the terms.

III. Blood Sacrifice

There must be a blood sacrifice or no covenant.

Exodus 24: “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar at the base of the mountain and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of bullocks to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put *it* in basins, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the Book of the Covenant, and read in the ears of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.’ And Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘Behold **the blood of the covenant**, which the LORD has made with you concerning all these words’” (vs 4-8).

That’s step three, blood sacrifice. No blood sacrifice, no covenant. Has to be! There has to be a blood sacrifice for our salvation and the covenant that God made with us. That blood sacrifice occurred some 2,000 years ago.

IV. A Communal Meal

The participants have to engage in a meal together. You mean, God had a meal with Israel? *You bet, He did!*

Verse 9: “And Moses went up, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. And they saw the God of Israel. And *there*

was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the heavens in clearness" (vs 9-10).

Sidebar: For those who say that God has no form or shape, I know one thing; *He's got feet!* God tells us He's got feet! They saw the feet of God! If they didn't see feet, what did they see?

Verse 11: "And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay his hands. Also they saw God, and ate and drank." There's your meal!

When it says that they saw God, that word is 'ha Elohim'—they saw Elohim. No if, ands or buts! He had form and shape. He wasn't in His full glory, but they saw His form, and they ate and they drank—there was the meal.

Now let's look at a covenant between two men that have all four of these elements in it, and let's see how it was actually entered into and consummated even before this.

Jacob and Laban

The actual rules for a covenant had not been codified at this point. You recall the story of Esau and Jacob, how Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright and the blessing. Esau was furious, so Rebecca and Isaac sent Jacob off to find a bride, to Laban who was Rebecca's brother. Unfortunately Jacob ran into a shyster, a trickster even more than he was. Jacob was a trickster; he really was. God had to work on him. {note sermon series *Saga of Jacob* by Michael Heiss}

After 20-plus years, Jacob said it was time; 'I've got to get out of here.' God told him that now was the time to leave. So, Jacob gets out of there and he doesn't tell Laban.

Genesis 31:17: "Then Jacob rose up and set all his children and wives upon camels. And he drove away all his livestock... [drove them forward] ...and all his goods, which he had gotten, the livestock of his property, which he had gotten in Padan Aram, in order to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan. Now, when Laban went to shear his sheep, Rachel stole the house idols, which were her father's" (vs 17-19).

There's something very important about those house idols, which we will cover in a minute.

Verse 20: "And Jacob deceived the heart of Laban the Syrian in that he did not tell him that he fled. And he fled with all that was his. And he rose up and passed over the river, and set his face toward Mount Gilead. It was told to Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled. Then he took his brothers with him and pursued after him seven days' journey. And

they overtook him in Mount Gilead" (vs 20-23). Laban was going to tell Jacob what for! But...:

Verse 24: "And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, 'Take heed that you do not speak either good or bad to Jacob.'" *Laban, Jacob is Mine! Don't you touch him, or else!* Laban was not in all-fired hurry to find out what the 'or else' might mean.

Verse 25: "Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now, Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount. And Laban with his brothers pitched in Mount Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob, 'What have you done that you have deceived my heart... [Look who's talking. Changed his wages ten times; gave him Leah instead of Rachel.] ...and carried away my daughters as captives *taken* with the sword?'" (vs 25-26). Talk about melodramatic!

Verse 27: "Why did you flee away secretly and steal away from me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with lyre?" If you believe that, I've got a bridge in Brooklyn I'd like to sell you. Give me a break here!

Verse 28: "And why have you not allowed me to kiss my sons and my daughters? You have done foolishly in so doing. It is in the power of my hand to do you harm. But the God of your fathers spoke to me last night, saying, 'Take heed that you do not speak either good or bad to Jacob.'" (vs 28-29). *I'd like to Jacob, but I can't!*

Verse 30: "And now you have gone because you longed after your father's house. Why have you stolen my gods?" That's very important about Laban's gods. Not because they were small idols. He could always get more idols. But there was something special about those gods. We're going to see it. I didn't realize it, but scholars have recently uncovered the evidence.

Finally, v 36: "And Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban. And Jacob answered and said to Laban, 'What *is* my trespass? What *is* my sin that you have so hotly pursued after me? For you have searched all my stuff—and what have you found of all your household stuff? Set it here before my brethren and your brethren that they may judge between us both'" (vs 36-37).

Then Jacob said all the things that happened to him when he was with Laban.

Verse 42: "Unless the God of my fathers, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty...." That's the truth; Laban would have sent him away empty.

Verse 43: "And Laban answered and said to Jacob, 'The daughters *are* my daughters, and the sons my sons...'"

Verse 44: "And come now, **let us make a covenant**, you and I. And let it be for a witness between you and me.' And Jacob took a stone and set it up as a memorial pillar" (vs 44-45). Why does Laban want this covenant? *There's a reason why he wants it!*

Verse 46: "And Jacob said to his brethren, 'Gather stones.' And they took stones and made a heap. And they ate there upon the heap." That's part of *the communal meal*.

Verse 47: "And Laban called it *in Syrian*, Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it *in Hebrew*, Galeed. And Laban said, 'This heap *is* a witness between you and me this day.' Therefore, the name of it was called Heap of Testimony, and Watchtower, for he said, 'The LORD watch between you and me when we are absent from one another. If you should afflict my daughters, or if you should take wives besides my daughters—though no man is with us—remember, God is witness between you and me.' And Laban said to Jacob, 'Behold this heap, and behold the pillar which I have set up between you and me'" (vs 47-51).

Here is the terms of the treaty, of the covenant, v 52: "This heap *is* a witness, and the pillar *is* a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you shall not pass over this heap and this pillar to me for harm." He did not say that 'I wouldn't pass over this area to you, Jacob, for harm, but that you, Jacob, will not pass over to me for harm.'

- What's he talking about?
- What's he worried about?

Verse 53: "The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac."

First we have the terms of the treaty: I'm not going to pass over to you; you're not going to pass over to me. East is east and west is west, the twain shall not meet. They accepted it. Jacob swore! Obviously, Laban accepted it because he's making the terms. Then we have to have sacrifice.

Verse 54: "And Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night in the mountain."

They had the sacrifice and they ate. So, there you are, the terms of the treaty, the acceptance, the

blood sacrifice and the meal.

What was Laban worried about? What scholars have found is that in that part of the world, for some reason—they haven't found out why—that household idols—idols attached to a household—also *served as a deed to that property*. He who had those household idols was proof that Laban owned this property. As long as Laban was alive, no one was going to contest it. But what would happen if, after Laban died, and somebody would come from Jacob's area and say, 'Behold, this property is mine. Laban gave it to me. I won them in a poker game.' Whatever it might be! 'Now, get out of here, I'm going to take possession of this house.' What would happen?

We're not sure, but Laban has said that this might have a hard time. Laban knows that Jacob is a man of God. He knows that God is with him, and he knows that if he can get Jacob to swear that he will not come across to him for harm, then he doesn't have to worry. That's why Laban was in hot pursuit. That's why he was so worried. He didn't want Jacob or Jacob's sons to come back and takeover his property.

As long as there was a covenant, Laban felt he was safe. That's the story of this covenant between Laban and Jacob; and we saw the four steps.

Now we're going to take a look at Scriptures that show that God specifically makes a covenant. The purpose of doing this is to see it in black and white in your Bible, in the Word of God, that God specifically says that He makes the covenant.

Exodus 34:5—you will get a feeling of God here: "And the LORD came down in the cloud, and stood with him [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth'" (vs 5-6). Did any of us ever think that only the New Testament God was a God of mercy, truth, kindness? *NO!*

Verse 7: "Keeping mercy to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but Who will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and to the fourth generation." Why is this? *God doesn't tell us here, because the iniquity is not repented of!* When you repent of iniquity and sin, God does forgive. He says that many times.

Just like the unpardonable sin, when you stop and think about it, what really is the unpardonable sin? *It is any sin not repented of!* If

you do not repent of the sin, in a sense it becomes unpardonable. God will forgive, but you have to ask Him. If you don't acknowledge and ask Him, He'll show it to you. But if we don't come before Him and ask His forgiveness, then we're not going to get it.

Verse 8: "And Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. And he said, 'If now I have found grace in Your sight, O LORD, I pray You, let my LORD go among us, although it *is* a stiff-necked people. And pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your inheritance'" (vs 8-9). Here's Moses acknowledging the sins, asking for the forgiveness.

Verse 10: "And He [God] said, 'Behold, **I make a covenant**.... [here's God declaring] ...Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation. And all the people in whose midst you *are* shall see the work of the LORD, for it *is* an awesome thing that I will do with you.'" Fabulous words! God said that *He was making a covenant!*

Verse 27: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words for yourself, for in accordance to these words... [Exo. 20-23] ...**I have made a covenant with you** and with Israel.'" God makes the covenant.

Deuteronomy 4:13—Moses saying about God: "And He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, *even* the Ten Commandments. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone." God declared His covenant! God makes the covenant!

In part three of this series we're going to go through the warnings and God's promises to Abraham. We'll look at an unconditional covenant that He made to Abraham; a promise.

When God makes an unconditional promise, such as giving the blessings to Abraham, ***God promises to fulfill His part by giving them to the people***. But if the people in turn do not acknowledge Him, He's under no obligation to continue those blessings. He promised to make Israel a great and mighty nation, but He never said that Israel could do whatever it pleased and still maintain those blessings.

The unconditional part was in giving them to Israel. It was not in maintaining them. We'll see where God says many times, *IF you do this, then I will continue My covenant!* But what God promised was, on His own—by Himself, without cause—He would never forsake Israel. He would never break His covenant. He would keep it always. Unless, of course, Israel did something to provoke God.

Scriptural References:

- 1) Exodus 19:3-6
- 2) Exodus 24:1-4
- 3) Deuteronomy 4:9-13
- 4) Exodus 34:27-28
- 5) Exodus 24:3, 7
- 6) Deuteronomy 5:22-29
- 7) Exodus 24:4-11
- 8) Genesis 31:17-30, 36-37, 42-54
- 9) Exodus 34:5-10, 27
- 10) Deuteronomy 4:13

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Hosea 2
- Psalm 89
- Exodus 20-23

Also referenced: Sermon Series:

Saga of Jacob by Michael Heiss

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