

The Doctrine Of Israel (Part Two): The Old Covenant

Terms and Conditions

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I think we are all familiar with contracts. Perhaps not the intricate legalistic language of contracts, we are not contract lawyers or anything, but I think we know their value and their function and how often we have to get into them. In brief, contracts are agreements that specify the terms and conditions in which a project will be completed. The project can be something as simple as providing a one-time service, let us say cleaning the carpet or something in a home. Or it could be as complex as a multibillion dollar development and construction plan involving, who knows how many, maybe hundreds of individuals, companies, and government agencies, all having to have their part put down on paper so that the development will get done.

Even though they have this great range of uses, all contracts are essentially the same when it comes down to brass tacks. Beth and I signed a contract just this week to get new windows for the house. Our present windows are more than 20 years old, so it was about time to do it. So contracts are on my mind.

We are, really, involved in contracts almost daily. Your employment is a contract between your employer and you. When we check the box saying that we accept the terms and conditions for using a certain app or piece of software, the EULA (the End User License Agreement), we are signing a contract, essentially, to abide by their terms. When we employ someone to repair or improve our house, we enter a contract with him or the company to do the work. When we buy a new vehicle, especially if we go through a dealer, we sign a sales contract. And even if we go personally, we usually sign something like a bill of sale. Those are all different kinds of contracts.

In fact, just about every transaction between people can be considered a sort of contract between them, a good or a service in exchange for money or some other sort of payment is what is on the line there. Sometimes the payment is a service that one gives to the other. It could even be a kind of

barter of service for service. Let us say, if you cut my hair, I will change your oil, or if you mow my lawn, I will hang your new door, or something that is fairly equivalent to that sort of thing. In any case, both parties of the contract as equal partners in the endeavor, whatever it happens to be, have certain responsibilities that they agree to perform for the success of the project or exchange.

Now, in a perfect world (we would like it to be a perfect world but it is not), everyone who engages in a contract would fulfill his part in it to the letter. But like I said, we do not live in a perfect world. We live in a very imperfect world, fraud runs rampant in this society. You know, insurance companies have to essentially put, I think the number is somewhere around 40% or might even be more, on top of your premiums because of fraud, because there are so many people who are doing things that they should not be doing and costing money. Sometimes a contracted company will fail to deliver the good or service required. In other times the individual fails to pay the contracted amount. People skip town on contracts, contractors and others use substandard materials or they put in the wrong thing. People bounce checks, they make major mistakes in delivery or installation. People drag their heels and do not finish the project on time.

So, language usually goes into most written contracts regarding penalties for noncompliance to the stated terms. It allows one party to engage in legal means to recoup its losses from the other offending party. It is there in the contract that if somebody reneges on something or does not do something right, then they can go to the courts to get that thing done. So one can file a lawsuit, or if it is bad enough, they could even bring criminal charges against the other person for failing to do what they said that they would do.

There might be language in the contract that make some sort of binding arbitration the first step before you take these more drastic measures. But that is part of the contract that those kind of moves are allowable if certain conditions are met. Monetary penalties might be included in the language of the contract, depending on how long the completion of the project is overdue. For instance, the contract for the I-77 toll lanes going north out of Charlotte, which has been under construction for three or four years now, carries a \$10,000 per day penalty or fine for incompleteness. That was to begin on November 1, and as far as I know, they have not finished them yet, not

completely. So they are paying \$10,000 a day because the company that contracted with the State of North Carolina to get those done did not finish on time. On the other hand, some contracts contain inducements and rewards for early completion or for going above and beyond the contract's terms. So there may be a bonus for early completion or some other incentive.

The main takeaway from all of this (I know it has been rather boring and legalistic), but what I wanted you to understand is that a contract spells out, in legal terms, what the project is and how and when it is to be completed, who the parties to it are, and what each is expected to do, along with the rewards for compliance and/or penalties for noncompliance. All of those features are usually in a contract, especially one that is drawn up by lawyers. They want to cover every base, make sure everything is there, so that when, or if, it happens to be brought before a judge, that the language will be there to make it watertight.

Of course, not only that, but these contracts must be signed by the parties involved, or their legal representatives. A lot of times, contracts are also sealed in one way or another. That is a little bit more old fashioned, but oftentimes a notary will put his seal on it as part of witnessing it so it has a stamp of legality and everything there is supposed to be based on the truth. Some contracts require a formal oath, depending on how serious they are. At the last closing on our home refinance, we had to affirm our identities on a Bible. The notary insisted that we do that so that we are who we say we are, I guess.

In fact, with few variations in the details, this is how contracts, and I am not just speaking about business contracts but formal agreements of any sort—settlements, conventions, compacts, pacts, concords, treaties, or covenants—have always been made. This is how it is done. People have been making these kind of agreements since the beginning of humankind and they all take after one another in many of these same ways. So the basic parts are always there in a formal contract.

Even the divine covenants: the Adamic, the Noachian, the Abrahamic, the Sabbath covenant, the Old Covenant, the New Covenant, all of them contain these elements to one degree or another and are just as formal and legally binding as any business contract or treaty between nations. Perhaps they are

even more binding since they involve the divine Judge and the Sovereign Lord of all creation. When He is involved in things, who backs it? Him. Covenants with Him have profound spiritual and eternal consequences, not just physical ones.

Thus begins my second sermon on the subject of Israel in this new series that I am getting into, and in this sermon we will cover the Old Covenant. You probably figured that out by now.

I am not so concerned about the nitty-gritty of the details of the individual laws that are contained within the Old Covenant. That would take a long time to go through. We are going to look at some of it just in passing. But I am more interested in the covenant's part in the relationship between God and Israel and also to help us understand why this covenant is being replaced by a superior covenant. I would like to begin with that in Hebrews the eighth chapter. We are just going to read verses 7 and 8 and 13. Because I want you to understand from the very beginning that this covenant was essentially doomed from the beginning. I do not want to go into that very much at this point, I will get into that a little bit later. But I want you to see it right now in black and white here in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 8:7 For if that first covenant [meaning the Old Covenant] had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

He is laying down here that there is a second, the New Covenant. There is one that is being inaugurated among the people of God and it replaces the one that came before, which he calls here the first, because it had a fault. There was something that doomed it from the very beginning and he answers in verse 8 what that fault is.

Hebrews 8:8 Because finding fault with them . . .

What he means there is the people, Israel, one of the parties to this covenant, the fault was with them. You would never say that the fault was with God. God is perfect. He always keeps His promises and does what He says He will do. His word is inviolate. If He says He is going to do this, promise this, give this, *He is going to do that*. And when He writes it down in a covenant, it is

doubly sure, if you will, that it is going to happen. But the only part of that covenant that had a problem was the second party, the people of Israel, who did not have what it took to fulfill their part of the bargain.

Hebrews 8:8 He says, "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

Hebrews 8:13 In that he says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

To us now, in this time, in what we might call the Christian age with the beginning of the church, this has now been made obsolete. It has been taken over by a New Covenant and the people are those whom God has called—the new Israel, the Israel of God. And of course physical Israel will come into this later. But right now they have been set aside and it is the church that is carrying the torch on this New Covenant.

This is where we begin understanding from the very beginning that this document, this covenant that we are going to study today, was doomed to failure because of the people. Not everyone, and especially among Israelites, are of the caliber of Abraham or of Isaac or of Jacob—men who could keep the covenant with Him—of Moses, of Joshua, and some of the others. I mean, even Joshua made some pretty big mistakes. Even though he did everything that God told him to do, he did a few things that God told him not to do and it doomed the covenant in time. I am speaking specifically about making the covenant with the Gibeonites, which we will see later is specifically in the covenant not to do. So even though these men made mistakes, they could still keep the covenant almost perfectly—not quite—but they could keep it in the spirit and in the letter quite well. So there were a few that could, but generally the people of Israel could not. And I think you know why those particular people were able to keep it so well, whereas the Israelites in general were not. We will get to that later.

You think I would jump right all the way back to Exodus 19 and start getting into the covenant. But I want to go back one more book into the book of Genesis in chapter 17 because we have one thing that we need to get out of

the way here before we go any further. This is God's statement to Abraham, or Abram as it was at the moment, about the covenant they would make between themselves—between God and Abraham.

Genesis 17:1-8 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be called Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

This is a formal statement of the Abrahamic covenant that God initiated by calling Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees. That was the first broaching of this idea of a covenant between them. In the intervening four chapters, between chapter 12, where God called Abram out of Ur, to the end of chapter 16, God had made additional promises to Abraham, although they were all basically expansions of the promises He had made in chapter 12, verses 1-3. When He laid that out in verses 1-3, it was pretty expansive. My dad's sermons on the "I wills" of the Abrahamic covenant went over all that stuff, just how awesome and eternal that promise is.

But the promises there in Genesis 13-16 leading up to this are essentially one-sided promises telling Abraham that he would have a son and granting him and his descendants the land of Canaan. Those were basically the two major factors that were in all of those intervening little promises between chapters 13 and 16. It says that Abraham believed God and it was accounted for him

as righteousness. Righteousness means right doing, so it is not just being righteous, but it is actually *acting* righteous, *doing* righteous. His faith was counted as a good work, if you will, of doing right under the covenant.

To this point (chapter 15 verse six, where it says "and he believed in the Lord and he accounted it to him for righteousness"), formally, meaning what was put in Scripture for us to understand, God had asked almost nothing of Abram. The only thing He had really asked him to do to this point was leave Ur, go to Haran, and come to Canaan. He had not given him a long list of laws or requirements. All He had done was say, "Abraham, I want you to take your father and your whole family and leave Ur and go where I tell you to go."

And that is what he did. He believed God that there was going to be something good at the end of all this, he trusted Him and he went, and that belief in God's Word is what was accounted as righteousness. He was showing himself to be righteous through his faith, through his belief and trust in God. It did not hang on anything else that he had done. It was not because he had done sacrifices or he had done this, or that, or the other thing, according to law. It was that he simply believed God and God said, that is what I am looking for. That is righteousness, to believe Him without actually the requirements of law. Simply to believe God and to act in faith because God said so, because God had had given him an order to do what he did, and he just did it.

So up until this point, Abram's part in the covenant was to believe and act on the basis of that belief. Now, I am sure Abraham knew some of the laws from earlier in history. You know, those things were probably passed down through his line all the way from Noah and Shem. But what we are given in the Bible are not those laws. We are given the fact that God called him and Abraham responded in faith. So Abraham believed God's Word and his faith was accounted as righteousness.

When we get to Genesis chapter 17, He defines the terms more completely of Abraham's part in the covenant. But he had already been doing those things. And what are those terms? It is found right there in verse 1, "Walk before Me and be blameless." That was the extent of the terms in the contract, as it were, between God and Abraham of what was required of him,

at least to this point. So He said, "Walk before Me and be blameless." This presupposes or assumes that there are laws. There are ways, principles that are God's requirements, God's standards. But he did not have to name them here to Abraham. He just said, "Walk before Me and be blameless" because Abraham had already proved to Him that he would walk in faith. So that was his part in the covenant.

This is an extremely high standard. Walk before Me, meaning have a relationship with Him, walk together with Him, and be perfectly righteous and upright. Huge, high standard. The covenant Abraham made with God was not just a gift of descendants and power and land, but it required a relationship with God. That was the big thing that God was seeking with Abraham—a relationship. And it also included by these terms, "Walk before Me and be blameless," obedience to what God said, obedience to His voice, and right living does. They are all included. But the big thing here was that Abraham believed, and he was willing to go and do what God wanted him to do without question. He trusted God.

Now, why I have gone into all of this is because the Abrahamic Covenant, as Paul shows in Romans 4, is the model of the New Covenant. He is essentially reaching back into history with us and pulling the Abrahamic Covenant forward and saying this is what I want you to do. I want you to walk before Me and be blameless and trust Me in faith. Paul goes into this in his own way there in Romans, trying to show us that we now live by faith in Jesus Christ and that that is what our covenant with Him is all based upon, on faith, not on works. Works cannot do you any good, really, in terms of salvation, except the part they play in helping us to build character. But what God wants to see is faith and obedience to His voice.

So the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant that we have gotten into with God by baptism, is an intimate, faithful relationship with God, one that He desires with each person He calls. Now, there is obviously more to it, but this is the basic understanding of the New Covenant. That we are reaching back to the way He interacted with Abraham on a one-on-one basis so that they had a relationship based on faith and trust. And the obedience came later, or followed after, maybe that would be a better way to put it. Because he trusted in God, he obeyed God.

Genesis 17:9-14 God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

The covenant that He made with Abraham required a sign—an indicator, an identifier, an emblem, a token, a mark, a reminder, however you want to put it. This sign identified those who were parties to the covenant with Abraham. And the sign, circumcision, was itself a separate covenant within the greater covenant. So there was the covenant with Abraham that was overall. And then the sign itself was a covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. Each male child was to be circumcised at eight days old, as well as each man—slave or a servant—whoever entered the covenant as an adult. Everybody that was under the umbrella of the nation of Israel was supposed to be circumcised, among the males, that is.

This was a way that one could see in his own flesh, and others could see if that were necessary, that you were part of that covenant. It was like a brand, if you will. It was a scarring that showed that you were part of this covenant. And of course we know that the Israelites were brought into this covenant when they did not know anything. They could not make a decision, yes or no, whether they wanted to be in this covenant. They were essentially born into it and the covenant was stamped on them. And so, this was a hereditary type of thing and people just were born and grew up in it.

Also, if a person was not circumcised, if the parents did not circumcise their children, their child, it says that this child was cut off from his people. It was

serious! He had no part in the covenant if that were the case, and no expectation of receiving any of the rewards or blessings of the covenant that may have been due him had he been part of the covenant. This "cut off from his people" means at least excommunication from the culture, from the nation. So the person was expelled. It may also include execution, although most scholars that I read commenting about this did not think that was likely.

But one of the things that it could mean, and I think this one is kind of interesting, is that it is expulsion, yes, from the community, but it is expulsion to die an untimely death at God's discretion. Meaning if a person did not take circumcision in Israel, he was under a curse of divine punishment. That makes it pretty serious stuff. I do not know if that is particularly true, but I think it is worth thinking about. Certainly they would be cut off from Israel, they would be cut off from God's protection, they could be cut off from God's blessing, so an untimely death is not unthinkable. They were not under God's protection and so they did not know when they were going to die. They had no promise of something better for their lives other than death. I just thought I would tell you those possibilities, because God is very serious about these things.

Now, this separate covenant of circumcision applies to all of Abraham's descendants and since the Israelites were a major branch of Abraham's progeny, then circumcision was required of them. I mean, it makes sense that since Israel was part of Abraham, then Israel would have to be circumcised. Even the other branch through Ishmael does the same thing. They regard this as a solemn thing to do. But circumcisions are mostly known as an Israelite or Jewish thing in the world today.

So they had this historical memory going down through the ages of circumcision being part of the Abrahamic covenant and so they circumcise their children. It is possible that the Egyptians did not allow Israel to circumcise their children while they were slaves. Why is that? Just an interesting little tidbit of information that some of the Egyptians circumcised. Not every Egyptian dynasty did, but some Egyptian dynasties did too. The circumcision was a sign of superior status and so they would not allow the slaves to be circumcised lest they think that they were better than the Egyptians. And so they would forbid it.

But circumcision, they knew, was a required thing and perhaps they forgot it a little bit during the enslavement in Egypt. God reminded Moses very forcibly in Exodus 4:24-26 that he needed to circumcise his son and so Zipporah did that for him, much to her consternation. Then the Passover requirements that are given in Exodus 12 explicitly forbids any uncircumcised person to partake of it. So they must have undergone a forced, if you will, circumcision of all adult males at that time, right around Passover before they left Egypt. It was performed again as they entered the Promised Land under Joshua, in Joshua 5. So we have these instances in the Pentateuch of circumcision being done.

Here in Genesis 17 it is quite graphic there about what has all occurred. Then Isaac obviously was circumcised, Ishmael was circumcised, Jacob was obviously circumcised, and then I assume he circumcised his sons. We do not know anything after that. The next time we hear of it is there at Moses circumcising his son, and then Exodus 12 when the Passover regulations were made. So they had to be circumcised then. And you know what? It is only mentioned three times after that until you get to Joshua 5.

Did you know (this was an astounding fact that I knew, but I did not know, if you will), that circumcision is not mentioned in the Old Covenant. Between the first Passover, that is, when the tenth plague occurred, and Joshua 5, it is only mentioned three times, and only in Leviticus 12:3 when it is talking about the rules of childbirth, does it concern physical circumcision. It says there that a male child shall be circumcised on the eighth day. That is it, it is gone. There is nothing more said about it there. The other two times that it appears in the Pentateuch before we get to Joshua 5, is Deuteronomy 10:16 and Deuteronomy 30:6, and both of those times it appears in the phrase "circumcise the foreskin of the heart" or "circumcise the heart." You can see that already in the Pentateuch the idea of circumcision in God's mind was moving away from the physical and going toward the circumcision of the heart, the spiritual circumcising, not an outward part of the body, but an inward part of the heart. Something inside.

Otherwise, its absence from the Old Covenant is understandable because circumcision is actually part of the Abrahamic Covenant, not the Old Covenant, like we saw there in Genesis 17. But the Abrahamic Covenant and the Old Covenant are made with the same people. And so what essentially

happened is that the two covenants, the Abrahamic and the Old Covenant, were folded together. Those were things that were required of the same people so the terms kind of flowed between the two different covenants.

We get a little hint of this in Galatians 4, verses 21 through the end of the chapter, where Paul talks about the two covenants, one being Hagar, one being Sarah, and he kind of takes the time of Abraham and the time of Moses and all that and kind of puts them all together and you have Mount Sinai being one and Jerusalem above being the other and all that sort of thing. He kind of pushes everything, smashes it together, and does what he does with his preaching there.

So by the time you get to not very long later, I do not know exactly when you would start this, but it is not very long thereafter that circumcision was considered a part of the Old Covenant too. And the circumcision was seen as the mark of one who was party to the Old Covenant and keeping the law of Moses. That is what you see in Acts 15. They say pretty much that same thing, that circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant and the law. I wanted to get to that because I want you to understand why we do not see circumcision in the Old Covenant once we are going through it here in Exodus 19.

If you would, please go to Exodus 19. I have 30-something minutes to talk about the Old Covenant. I hope that was understandable. I hope I did not confuse anybody about that. We can call this the prelude to the Old Covenant.

Exodus 19:1-8 In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from 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 to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, 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." So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.

Like I said, this is the prelude to the Old Covenant. It is the opening salvo of the compact that God would make with Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob, or Israel.

(By the way, I have a pet peeve I want to tell you. There were no Israelites before Jacob. *He was Israel*. He was the first. Also there were no Jews before Judah. Judah was the first Jew. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, were not Jews. They were Hebrews. You could call Joseph an Israelite, but you could not call Isaac an Israelite. That is just the way it is. In fact, the term Jew does not appear in Scripture until Ahaz was king of Judah. That is about the same time that Israel went into captivity. Ahaz was king of Judah from 732 to 716 BC. That is 700 years after this time we are talking about here. So Abraham was not a Jew. Okay, pet peeve over.)

In this little prelude here, God sets out the parties of the covenant, obviously Himself being the major one and the house of Jacob or the children of Israel as the other party. He also sets out the basic terms of the covenant. Now, Israel's part, as it said very simply here, is to obey Him and keep His covenant. Pretty simple, huh? Yeah, no. But this is the simplified version of the covenant—obey God and keep His covenant.

God's part is a little bit more expansive. He would regard them as His special treasure more than any other people on earth. He would make them, over time, a kingdom of priests, He would make them a holy nation that is a model nation for other peoples of the earth to observe and emulate. That was what He was going to do. That is the project. It is that simple. But on the other hand, it is much more complex than that. Like I said, this is only the prelude and it is just setting out the basic terms.

So Moses brings it back to the elders and I assume that the elders took it to the people and they said, "Hey, yeah, we'll do this, sign us up, we'll do all that You say!" That is what we see there in verse 8. Now, they probably had no idea what keeping the covenant and obeying God would entail. They might have had a little inkling, but they did not really understand what it would take to fulfill their part in the covenant. I think (this is my own little belief here), that they zeroed in on one phrase, "above all peoples of the earth." I think that is the phrase that they honed in on.

You have got to remember, they were recently a freed slave people. They had been in bondage for over 200 years, something like that. A long time they had been in bondage and for God to promise power and prestige over all the other peoples of the earth was like a dream come true. "We're going to go from the bottom to the top and all we have to do is agree to what our God says that we need to do." So they grabbed at it with both hands. It is like they said, "For that we'll do anything You ask. Just name it. Where's my throne?" But there was a problem. Let us go to Psalm 78. If you know your chapters, you will know Psalm 78 is a listing of Israel's rebellions in the wilderness. So what we are going to get into is not good. The psalmist Asaph, here, sets out the problem very plainly.

Psalm 78:5-8 For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children [This is the covenant and all the laws that were within it.]; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God.

We are getting back to the point that we brought up originally in Hebrews 8. It was the people who were at fault, those people who stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and said, "Yeah, yeah! This is what we want." They were a

stubborn and rebellious generation, God calls them. They did not set their heart aright, there was something wrong with them inside. They did not change. He goes on to say that their spirit was not faithful to God.

Now let us notice verses 10 and 11. What did they not do?

Psalms 78:10-11 They did not keep the covenant of God, they refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them.

These are the exact two things that are mentioned in Exodus 19 that God said they needed to do, the first two of these. They are just flipped over. God said back in Exodus 19, "Therefore if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant I will. . . do this." What does it say here from Asaph? That they did *not* keep His covenant and they refused to obey His voice or keep His law.

Then he gives us one additional thing that they did. Verse 11, they "forgot His works." Can you imagine that? This was the same generation that saw ten plagues hit Egypt. They saw the firstborn die. These people saw the Red Sea open and they walked across on dry land. They saw water gushing out of a rock giving water to hundreds of thousands of people. They saw manna come out every day except the Sabbath for 38 years. They saw quail fall from the sky by the millions to feed their lust for meat. How many times did God save them in the wilderness? He had them defeat Amalek within about the first week. But they forgot those things. It boggles the mind!

How could people forget such awesome, miraculous acts to keep them safe and fed and alive in a wilderness area? To me, it is incredible to think about the fact that they were so unappreciative and unresponsive to God. But they were. We were just read it a few minutes ago. But there was something wrong in them. Their hearts were twisted. Their spirits were not set to look favorably upon God. And so are we all when we function by human nature and not God's Spirit. This could be said about any other people in the world. Their hearts are not set aright to follow God. Their spirit is not one that will follow God. And it is because of the spirit in them that makes them hostile.

Let us go back to Exodus chapter 20 this time. I am still on this theme here. I want to read verses 18 through 21. We will skip over the Ten Commandments for now.

Exodus 20:18-21 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die." Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

What we see here is God purposely put on a display of His awesome power. We see it beginning at the end of chapter 19, and it is picked up again here. Evidently through this whole recitation of the Ten Commandments—thunderings and flashes of lightning and all that was there, the mountains smoking, and everything quaking, and the trumpet blowing—these were all going on. The reason: to instill fear in the people.

Now, why would God want to instill fear in the people? Because it is the fear of Him and coming under the curse of the law that would help them keep from sinning. That is what he says here. "God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." He was trying to give them as much help as possible by revealing His awesome and mighty power so that they would say, "This is our God. We better not disobey, we better not break this covenant, because if we do all of this terrible power and might is going to come back on us. So let's be good." At least they would have the fear of death, fear of punishment keeping them on the straight and narrow.

He was trying to help them develop the beginnings of what we call the fear of God, and the fear of God would prevent them, not on its own, but it would help very much in preventing them from sinning. Making them make at least one more thought, saying maybe I should not do this, because God. But as Psalm 78:41 goes on to show, instead what did they do? They limited God. They shrank Him down, they put bounds on God. Or maybe as Psalm 50:21

says they reduced Him so much that they considered Him to be just like them. They did not see the difference between the Holy God and His mighty power, and themselves. They considered themselves to be on an equal basis with Him.

So, what did they do? They shrugged off their part in the covenant and they did their own thing. They never invested in the covenant at all. It was not a priority to them. They did not want to do it. They agreed to it, but they would rather do their own thing. You could say that they abrogated it as soon as it was sealed. From the very beginning, they did not want it. Even though they said they did, in their hearts they did not.

While we are here, Exodus 20 verses 1-17 are the Ten Commandments. If chapter 19 was the prelude to the covenant, then Exodus 20:1-17 is the preamble to it. It contains all the basic principles of the law, all the basic principles that were supposed to be contained in the covenant. Now we have got to remember that even though we would call the Ten Commandments the preamble to the Old Covenant, we need to understand that these laws that are written here in Exodus 20 were not created at this time. We find them *all* before this in Scripture, in principle, if not in direct statements. Even the seventh-day Sabbath. That is one of the first ones mentioned, if it is not *the* first one mentioned in the Bible, in Genesis 2. God rested on the seventh day and He expects us to rest of because of His example.

And so we have this principle that comes out of this sort of thing. That what does not originate in a covenant cannot be disposed of by its abolition. Think of it this way, put it in terms that we would understand because of dealing with in our own lives. Most legally binding contracts have within its terms that this contract is written up or goes under the laws of the state or of the nation in which it is drawn up.

The way the Protestants would have it is, if we got rid of a contract, then we would get rid of all the laws of the United States or the particular state in which it was legally binding. That is not how it works. Those laws of the state or the nation are so much superior to the individual contract that they remain inviolate whether that contract lives or dies, as it were. It does not matter what happens to that contract. Those laws of the state, of the nation, are going to remain. And the same holds true in the covenants of God. You

cannot get do away with something in a covenant that was there before and is of much more importance.

So even though the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, is not formally prior to this in a formal statement like we see here in Exodus 20, those laws were still there before this. Why? Because they are the supreme law of God Almighty! It does not matter if they were written on stones or whatever before this time. They were already in effect and enforced. So God's Ten Commandments are eternal, inviolate, and endorsed by Jesus Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. They still remain. They are inserted into the Old Covenant because they are God's basic law at all times for all people. It does not matter who you are or when you lived, the Ten Commandments are still in force.

These laws show us not only how to live, but they reveal to us God's own character. If He requires this of us, He requires it of Himself because that is how He lives. He is just giving us rules to live by as He lives. And if we live by them then we will have a tremendous head start in living as God does.

That is why He gave it to Israel. He knew that they had severe problems from the very beginning with their heart, with their attitudes, with their ignorance, and many other things. And so He put this in here—the Ten Commandments—as the law that they were supposed to live by. The law that Abraham lived by, the law that Isaac had lived by, the law that Jacob had lived by. We could go back further and say Noah and Enoch and Seth and all those others who were righteous had also lived by these laws. He was not doing anything different by giving them the Ten Commandments than He had done before or as He has done since. This is just the way that He requires men to live.

So, the Ten Commandments are the preamble to the New Covenant too, not just the Old, but also the New. If you would go to Jeremiah 31:31-34, He says that the difference between the covenants is that He is going to write His laws in our hearts, the same laws, but they are not to be on tables of stone anymore. They are to be written in our own character as part of the way we live. This is also mentioned, repeated, in the section that we read there in Hebrews 8:7-13.

Starting in Exodus 20:22 and going all the way through chapter 23, verse 19, that is, the end of chapter 20, chapter 21, chapter 22, and part of chapter 23, are what we could call the specific terms of the covenant, where they are spelled out in these three chapters. They are a mixture of judgments and you will see that word in chapter 21, verse 1. He says, "These are the judgments which you shall set before them." Perhaps a better word would be ordinances. "These are the ordinances." They are the laws by which the nation of Israel was to function. Maybe another word you could say was regulations. These are the regulations that the people were to use in order to interact with one another. They were the regulations, or the rules, or the ordinances, the laws, the minor laws, or the more minor laws than the Ten Commandments, the judges were supposed to use to judge between people in a dispute.

Like I said, they prescribed proper interactions between people and they dealt with such things as slavery or being a servant within Israel and the rights that slaves and slave owners had. It covers violence between people. It covers animal control. Animals were a big part of lives at that time. It covers property, how you are supposed to work with your property. Obviously it covers sexual relations. It covers witchcraft, it covers justice within the community, and such things as bribery and that sort of thing. So it covers all the bases of living in a community at that time.

And the principles that are shown in this section are still applicable now. But a lot of this is physical stuff. If you have a bull and it gores someone, then this is what is supposed to happen. Two men get in a fight and they cause injury, this is what is supposed to happen. If you have a property, if someone comes in to steal, then this is what is supposed to happen. So He gives all these judgments or these ordinances so that people will know what is what in interactions between one another.

Now, there are also within this laws governing the worship of God. It raises the level a little bit here. It starts out actually with a law of the altar, they were to be of unhewn stones and the various things that He said about that in order for them to make sacrifices to worship God. There is things about the giving of firstfruits. There is a small section in chapter 23 about keeping the

Sabbath, and also, right after that, another section about keeping the feast days, specifically the pilgrimage festivals, going up to the place where God chose to place His name. That is all included in this Old Covenant.

Then we get to God's part because the laws that He gave them between the end of chapter 20 and about the middle of chapter 23 are all about what they need to do, all about what the Israelites need to do. And then He comes here at the end, starting in chapter 23 verse 20, and He gives what He is going to do.

Exodus 23:20-33 "Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.

So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River [Euphrates]. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant

with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

So this section covers God's promises within the covenant, reiterating a lot that was in the prelude: obey the Angel, obey My voice, serve the Lord. Then He adds further blessings. Pretty good ones too: protection from enemies, abundant food and water, healing, fertility, long life, an easy, gradual takeover of the Promised Land, and expanded territory that would go all the way from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates River. It also contains a few additional commands: completely remove the foreign gods from the land of Canaan, make no covenant with the people of the land, and do not let them dwell with you in the land.

Now Protestants say that it is impossible for anyone to keep God's law or to keep His covenant. But that is not true, at least in the letter it is not true. It is not easy, do not get me wrong, but it is not impossible. God would not have given Israel an impossible task. It is possible with the right heart, the right mind, the right motivation. The impossible thing to do is to *keep it without sin*. That is, keep it perfectly. Only Jesus Christ did that. He kept the law perfectly. But one can keep it in a general way, for the most part, with occasional slip ups.

The fact is, Romans 8:7 says that human nature hates God's law and will not subject itself to it. Human nature is the problem because it is selfish and open to the influence of Satan the Devil, and so it is in rebellion against God and His law. As Paul concludes in Romans 8:8, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. And he tells us, though, that we are in the Spirit, that we have an ability that has been given to us by the grace of God, that we can keep His law, we can please Him. So, without the intervention of God's Holy Spirit, human minds are set against God from the beginning— by immersion in this world, by being cut off from God, by being under the influence of Satan the Devil.

In the end, it is not that the Israelites *could not* keep the covenant. What really happened is that they had set their minds so that they *would not* keep the covenant. Remember what Asaph said. Their hearts were set against it. Their spirits were not right within them.

Let us conclude in Exodus 24. We will read the first eight verses. This is the Israelites affirming the covenant, as the paragraph marker says.

Exodus 24:1-8 Now He said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him." So 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. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words."

The covenant is here formally ratified and sealed with blood from burnt and peace offerings. Those burnt and peace offerings were saying that they were wholly in it and they were going to have a relationship with God.

So God and His people Israel were now formally bound together by this covenant to complete the project of forming Israel into a holy kingdom of priests under God, to be a model nation, to make a witness to the rest of the world. And it lasted less than 40 days. When Moses came down from the mount, he saw them bowing down to a golden calf.

Next time we are going to explore the up and down cycle of obedience and apostasy that led to Israel's downfall and exile.