

The Covenant of Grace: Broken

I. Sin is covenant breaking

- 1 John 3:4: “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”
- We don’t have to wonder if we’re accidentally offending God. God has clearly told us what is good and what is bad in the covenant.
 - Mic 6:8: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness [literally, to love ‘steadfast love,’ i.e., covenant fidelity!], and to walk humbly with your God?”
- Metaphor of adultery: just as adultery is a severe rupture of a covenant between people, so also God describes his people’s idolatry (their union with false gods) as *adultery*: Jer 3:9 “she [Judah] polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree [objects of worship].” Ezek 23:37: “With their idols they have committed adultery.”

II. God pursues his people through the prophets

- God sends prophets first as reconcilers, seeking to bring the people to repentance back to God.
 - Jer 7:25: “From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day.”
- The goal is covenant renewal. Examples:
 - 1 Kgs 18:39: In the confrontation on Mt. Carmel, when Elijah prays for fire to come down on the sacrifice and Baal is shamed, the people cry out, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God” (cf. Deut 4:35, 39).
 - 2 Kgs 23:2–3: after rediscovering the book of the covenant (probably Deuteronomy), the people renew the covenant with Josiah.
- Practical payoff: although God could have blasted them justly after their first offense, he is a loving shepherd who chases lost sheep.

III. The prophets prosecute God’s covenant

- At a certain point, it becomes clear that the people will never truly repent and be faithful to YHWH. Then the prophets become covenant lawyers, who prove Israel’s guilt in light of the covenant. Israel is worthy of judgment.
- Jeremiah 2 is a covenant lawsuit:
 1. List of witnesses (2:12)
 2. Preamble calling to judgment (2:4–5a)
 3. Historical prologue emphasizing the benevolence of the suzerain to the vassal (2:5b–7a)
 4. Indictments (2:7b–30)
 5. Verdict (2:35d–37d), accompanied with covenant curses.
- Practical payoff: God is just; he is not arbitrary in his judgments.

IV. Judgment comes as the covenant curses

- God’s covenant determines what judgment will look like.
- Lev 26:15–39 and Deut 28:15–68 specify the *covenant curses*, an escalating set of consequences climaxing in the worst curse of all: exile.

- The story of Israel in 1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 25 is a story of the fulfillment of the covenant curses. Exile is because Israel broke covenant (Jer 11:1–11)
 - Israel re-lives the story of Adam and Eve on a national scale.
- Ultimately, Jesus takes the curses of the covenant on himself when he dies (Gal 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”).

V. The weakness of the old covenant and the inevitability of the judgment

- The law had a fatal weakness: it could not overcome sin (Rom 8:3, 8).
- Thus even at the very beginning, Moses knows the old covenant will fail:
 - Deut 30:1 “When all these things have come upon you, the blessing *and the curse ...*”
 - Deut 31:20–29: as soon as I die, I *know* you will disobey.
 - Josh 24:19, right after the people say that they will obey all that the LORD has commanded, Joshua says, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God.”
 - The entire book of Jeremiah is a sustained proof that Israel is constitutionally incapable of obedience (cf. Jer 5:23; 6:27–30; 18:12).
- Just like with Abraham, obedience was never a requirement in order to be redeemed, but obedience *was* necessary for the enjoyment of the covenant blessings (Deut 28:1–15). Because they cannot obey, the covenant curses must befall the people (Deut 28:16–68).
- Thus, if the people are ever to be blessed, the old covenant must pass away and be replaced by a new and better covenant that gives people the power to obey (Jer 24:7; 31:31–34; Ezek 36:26–27).
- The old covenant came to an end at the cross of Jesus, and the new covenant began at his resurrection (more later). Now we have the Spirit, who overcomes our sin and gives us power to obey (Rom 6; Eph 1).