

The New World Covenant

 Various
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We've seen the event of Creation and the doctrines of God, man and nature, that establishes the Creator-creature distinction and the man-nature distinction. Then the event of the Fall and the doctrines of sin and suffering, that establish man as the responsible agent for evil and suffering throughout the cosmos. Then the event of the Flood and the doctrine of judgment-salvation that demonstrate that God is holy, but He is also loving, so that God both judges and saves, giving grace before judgment, one way of salvation, appropriation by faith, perfect discrimination and effecting both man and nature. The results of the Flood are a whole new world. When Noah and his family and the animal and bird kinds came off the ark they stepped off into an entirely new cosmos. That's Peter's commentary. Not just a new earth, but an entirely new universe. Today we turn to an event that occurred immediately after the Flood and is described in Gen 8-9 and in the passage we had read today, Ps 104:5-9. This is the last of the foundational events of history. After this we will have four special lessons, one that deals with interpretive issues in Genesis, another that deals with biological issues, a third that deals with physics and a fourth that deals with geological issues. There are implications of the Genesis text in these areas and I just want to show you how Genesis text informs us how to interact with the data scientists are finding. And this again will demonstrate that the Bible is a book about reality and not a religious book.

The event we are turning to today is called the Noahic or New World Covenant. New World is probably a better title. This often goes overlooked. So let's read it in Gen 8:20. The new world began with a family engaging in an act of worship. "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. **21**The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. **22**"While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease." **1**And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. **2**"The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. **3**"Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to

you, as I gave the green plant. **4**“Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood. **5**“Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man. **6**“Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. **7**“As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.” **8**Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, **9**“Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; **10**and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. **11**“I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.” **12**God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; **13**I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. **14**“It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, **15**and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. **16**“When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” **17**And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.” Then it goes on to describe Noah’s three sons, and how they gave rise to all the people on the earth. We’ll get into that later.

What we’re interested in is the covenant God made. If you look at this event seriously, you just had the flood, and how many people were left on the earth? Eight. Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives. Were they all believers? Yes. And God entered a covenant with them. Is that all? What else came off the ark? All the animals and birds and creeping things. And did God enter into a covenant with them? What did Gen 9:9 say, “I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth.” So God is entering into a covenant with man and nature. We’ve seen man and nature before, so that makes sense. But what is this covenant all about? The New World Covenant basically deals with world security. How is this world made secure? Is the world secure? Basically God made a promise of world security and the basis of its security is the word of God in the covenant that took place in connection with Noah’s sacrifice.

Let’s start by looking at this word covenant. Glance back at Gen 9:9. This is the first use of the word “covenant” in the text of Scripture. And the first usage is the most important because it colors the word for the rest of Scripture. So here is where we first learn the basics of a covenant that we will take with us in the study of all six covenants in the Bible. The Bible is very covenant structured. It’s not just stories thrown together. The stories are chosen relative to the covenants and so understanding the covenants is how you understand the Bible and how you understand history. The word for covenant is *berith* comes from a root which means “to cut” and the word itself means “contract.” In this sense this word is very accessible. It’s a contract and usually a contract is made between two parties and there are terms of the contract and the parties sign the contract. So if you have any

experience with contract then the covenants of Scripture are readily accessible to you. Sometimes, less formally we refer to “cutting a deal,” and the word basically means “to cut,” so you get the meaning there in a little less formal setting. The beginning of this idea is with Noah.

I want to make one observation and then point out the three pre-conditions for a covenant. The observation comes from a quote from Dr. William F. Albright who taught for many years at Johns Hopkins, a brilliant archaeologist, noted by many to be the Father of American Archaeology. This is a guy who’s looked first hand at the evidence, the inscriptions and did years of studying ancient cultures. And what he said is stunning. Of all the ancient peoples, “Only the Hebrews, so far as we know, made covenants with their gods or God.” Now, that’s a little reverse, God made covenants with them, but it conveys the point. And if you think about it, that’s a remarkable statement. All the other nations had gods and goddesses, but they never had any covenants with them. Why do you suppose that is? Why is it that of all the religions on earth the Bible is the only document where God makes a contract with man? The answer will shock you and it will give you a new confidence in the Scripture, especially when someone is waxing eloquent about all religions having truth in them and all leading to god. I’m not going to tell you the answer yet, but I am going to tell you that this is a remarkable thing; only the Scripture contains information about God coming into covenants with man.

Now let’s look at the three pre-conditions for a covenant. What already has to be in place before a contract can be made? For the first one, think of a contract made between you and a bank. Are you going to enter into a contract with a bank that can’t keep up their end of the deal? Would you dare make a contract with an unreliable party? What this is pointing out is that the first thing you have to have for God to make a contract is that the God who makes the contract has to be sovereign. When we dealt with the attributes of God back at Creation, we said sovereign means God controls whatsoever comes to pass. What this means is there is no one else who can compete with Him. There is no one on His level of existence. He’s the Creator and we’re the creature. What the pagan mind does, because it’s offended by this kind of authority, it erases the Creator-creature distinction and opts for the Chain of Being. The pagan mind is not offended by the idea of gods and goddesses, so it can have gods and goddesses all competing to see who will be the top dog, but they don’t have a sovereign God over all. And that sheds light on why in paganism there’s never a god or goddess who comes into a contract with man. Because if they were to come into a contract, how could they possibly keep it, they’re not reliable. Maybe another god will rise up stronger than that god that causes a breach of contract. So because paganism never has anyone finally in charge and thus paganism never has contracts with their god. But in Scripture God is sovereign, He’s reliable, He’s in control, and so there is a firm basis for Him making and keeping contracts.

Let’s go to the second pre-condition. What’s the second thing you have got to have to have a contract? Think of it in terms of a human contract again. Could two people that can’t communicate enter into a contract? Companies are going global now, what’s the problem with that, what’s the big demand now in all these international companies? People who are multilingual, people who can go over there and talk their language. So

if you don't have communication you're in trouble again. So, the second pre-condition is that you have to have a God who verbally reveals Himself. Paganism doesn't have that. We haven't touched much on this, but paganism, while they'll say they have dreams and visions, etc. they are minus public propositional revelation. For example, there's no thing that corresponds in any other religion to what went on at Mt. Sinai. No other religion on earth, none has a God who spoke in a valley of a mountain and two million people heard Him. No other religion claims that, Buddha doesn't claim that, Confucius doesn't claim that, Daoism doesn't have that, Hinduism doesn't have that, no other religion has that. They have no talking God, no publicly speaking God. Yeah, he may show up in a dream or something, but I mean public speaking, where you could take your phone and record Him speaking and play it back. Only the Bible has that. And if you don't have that, and all you have is muttering, are you going to enter into a contract with someone who mumbles? But in the Bible God speaks publicly, He has verbal capacity to enter into a covenant. So the first two pre-conditions that you have got to have to ever get a covenant with a God is an absolute sovereign who can keep covenant and a publicly speaking God who can make covenants. Without those forget it.

With those two in mind, let's move to the third. And let's start with the idea of a human contract, "Why do two people enter into a contract?" "Why, when you buy a car, do you sign an agreement?" Think about this, because this is the first time in the Bible we see a covenant. Isn't it to measure behavior. What do contracts do then? What's the whole field in law called contract law all about? It's about verifying the faithfulness of the parties. A contract sets the terms so that the parties know what is expected of them. This is the third thing, a covenant is designed to measure behavior. That's why in the Bible you read, "I am a covenant keeping God." It means He keeps his end of the bargain. Why would God enter into one of these contracts? What does that do for Him? Doesn't it demonstrate His faithfulness? Doesn't it show us over and over that He is reliable? Why would God want to show that? So we can trust Him. Because what He does is He demonstrates over and over and over that He is faithful, so when we read the word and we see His faithfulness, what does that enable us to do? Trust Him. So the third thing is that these contracts give you a tool, a yardstick if you will, to measure His behavior. They mark out what He says He will do and then you can see how He is faithful to do it and that enables us to trust Him. So the idea of covenant is an enormously important thing.

Now, the results of this are a fourth thing, and this is an implication. And some of you have probably already seen this implication. What does this say about the Bible? If the Bible becomes a record of God's faithfulness to His contract, what does that say about whether the Bible is errant or inerrant? It compels a doctrine of inerrancy doesn't it? What does the Bible become? It becomes part of a legal piece of evidence to which the laws of evidence are applied. So the idea of a covenant immediately implies that the Scriptures have got to be inerrant. They have to testify. It also explains why there are things like Matthew 1, which is a big long genealogy and you're trying to read the NT and it starts with this passage that puts you to sleep before you get out of chapter 1. Why do you suppose all those genealogies are in there for? Why, when you go through Leviticus and Numbers, this tribe was located here and there was this number of people here, so and so was all the way over to there,

etc. and I'm not into taking a census what do I want to read all this stuff for; a land survey... land survey, ah, that's interesting. Is there a land survey connected to the mortgage on your house in some way? You'd better believe it is. You're paying taxes on the basis of it. So, why do you suppose those land records are in the Scripture that everybody says "Oh, they don't mean a thing." What do you mean they don't mean a thing? Aren't they the legal records that say that group of people were promised that land and they lived in it and there the boundaries are! So this turns on a vast new light onto the whole testimony of the OT and NT. By the way, what do we call these, the Old and New what? Testaments. Legal documents. And isn't it striking that so many Christians are re-thinking the doctrine of inerrancy? This was a big discussion back in the 70's and I thought we had this all solved, but now we have Christians everywhere re-evaluating this doctrine. They're not sure we can trust the Bible. Well, friend, if the Bible has errors in it, how can I measure God's covenant behavior? I can't, I've got to have a perfect standard by which to measure. What happens in a court room, some witness comes in? The opposing lawyer always tries to make a witness look like a dork in the court. This guy can't remember what he had for lunch, for breakfast, he doesn't know what clothes he wore yesterday, and you're telling me you saw so and so run his car into this other person? Come one, don't believe this witness. What's happening in the court? They're demeaning the witness. Why? To undermine his credibility! So what do you suppose Satan wants to do to the Bible? Destroy its credibility. So, if he can destroy its credibility then the promises can't be trusted, the covenants can't be trusted. It's that simple. So, three preconditions for a covenant, one implication and now we want to go into the arrangements of these covenants.

Now, let's go into the parts of the covenant, and wherever you go in the Bible, you look for these four parts, because I'm going to give an outline and you can basically follow this outline, not just in the New World Covenant but in the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic, the Land, and the New Covenant. They all follow this basic structure.

The first part is the parties to the covenant. Just ask yourself, who is involved in the covenant. In Gen 9:9 who is involved? God is. He's making the covenant, and who does He make the covenant with? Look carefully at who is included in the Noachic Covenant. "I Myself do establish My covenant with you," that's Noah, "and with your descendants after you," which is the rest of the human race. So the parties to the covenant, God and all humanity, because all humanity have the genes of Noah and his sons and daughters-in-law. Does this mean there are unbelievers in the Noachic Covenant? You'd better believe it. This covenant is made with everyone, Christian and Atheist. Who else? Gen 9:10, "and with every living creature that is with you," that comes out of the ark, "the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth." So all present humanity, and all animal life and all bird life that descended from the ark, they are in a covenant with God, which means all live. Those are the parties to the agreement. That should tell us something about how God is concerned about the environment. This is an ecological dimension to the covenant here. It beats Earth Day, hands down. If I were a kid I'd just love Earth Day because I would love to talk about Noah and see how far I could push it.

The second part is the sign of the covenant. There's always a sign. The sign of this one is in verse 12, the rainbow. "God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I set My bow in the cloud." The bow or rainbow. What's the origination of the rainbow? Turn to Ezek 1, this is the book you never open about half way through the OT, a very difficult book to interpret. Ezekiel, like Isaiah, sees a great Theophany, we're going to go right into the throne room of God through the eyes of Ezekiel. In Ezek 1:27 you see at the end of the verse there "was a radiance around Him, As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD." So in the throne room of God there's a radiance around God that appears like a rainbow. What I'm getting at is what's the source of the rainbow? Is it just the physics of water droplets and light, or is there something more going on here? Is it that God designed the physics of water droplets and lights to be reflective of His rainbow encircled throne, such that the rainbow down here in our atmosphere is reflective of the original rainbow in the throne room of God. You're not just seeing an optical phenomenon, you're getting a glimpse into the throne room of God. That's why it's the sign, because it's given to all men everywhere and all men everywhere see rainbows. It's stunning to think of this. Next time you see a rainbow it should be a worshipful experience, because when you look at the bow in that cloud you only see pieces of it, usually. A rainbow actually is a circle if you get high enough in an airplane, but you can't see a circle when you're on earth so you only see what looks like a semi-circle. So you have just a piece, just a fragment of that, a bow. So the rainbow is the sign.

The third part is the legal terms of the New World Covenant. The legal terms are what is expected of the parties. In Gen 9:11 these are stated very clearly. "I will establish My covenant with you, and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." Two things, very specific. The flesh and the earth, so every other weather disaster in history that will ever happen, whether it's the tsunami tides of India or a hurricane or some kind of flood wherever, there will never ever again be a geological disturbance that violates either of those two terms in verse 11. The two terms provide a geophysical system of verifying the faithfulness of God, such that if there were ever a geological disturbance that broke either one of these terms, the covenant would be broken. It is meant to be enforced forever, it will never be challenged and nothing can happen that will violate it. There are certain physical problems that we'll get into, that have stunning implications about the physics of the rest of the universe. But the point is that that covenant cannot be violated, and the terms are quite clear. Let's see how that carries out. In Isaiah 54 this covenant is referred to as a basis for all other covenants. In other words, if God is faithful geophysically, then God is faithful spiritually, and again I point out to you the Bible is not talking just about people's religious experiences. Don't retreat to that ground. You yield the entire external world to the pagans, and then you start talking about religious experiences in your heart as though God doesn't rule outside of your heart. Wrong. God is a public God. In Isaiah 54:8 look at the logic, this is embedded deep within the prophetic structures of the OT. Verse 8, "In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you, Says the

LORD your Redeemer." In the Hebrew there's two words for love, and one of them is *chesed* and it's that word translated "lovingkindness" and that word is more technical than that, it means faithfulness to a contract. Example: boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, boy in Hebrew loves girl, that's one verb. Boy loves girl, boy marries girl, husband loves wife, that word is different, it's *chesed*. Why is that? Because there's a covenant, different word. So there's a technical term used here in the OT, and again it's missed because people don't think about what we're reading, we're so familiar with it. Wow, wait a minute, the word everlasting lovingkindness is powerful in verse 8 because He says I will forever adhere to My covenants that I have told you about, everlasting, I never will break them. That's what's going on here. Now what does He use as a sign: Verse 9, this is what He's talking to Israel in Isaiah's day, "For this is like the days of Noah to me: When I swore that the waters of Noah should not flood the earth again, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor will I rebuke you." The eternal security of Israel is grounded on the continuation of the Noahic Covenant. So if this covenant doesn't hold, there's deep trouble.

Let me pause and show you the ridiculousness of the *Accommodating* school of Bible interpretation. These people always want to localize the flood. Don't you see a problem with this? If the Noahic flood was local, there have been some other local floods, right? What do we do with the whole structure of the Noahic Covenant? It goes down the drain. If it was a local flood in the book of Genesis then it's already been violated. You have to, if you're going to interpret the text seriously, you have to hold to a global Flood, there's no way around it. You tear down all the covenants, and this is a typical verse, verse 9, in the OT, where if you tear down one covenant you tear down them all. It's interesting that Jesus goes back to this, because as He talks about His second coming, what does He talk about "as in the days of Noah."

The fourth and last part is the founding sacrifice. Every covenant is made with sinful man, and therefore every covenant is grounded on the sacrifice. In Gen 8:20 and 22 you have Noah's worship. In this situation, remember how many of the clean animals did Noah bring aboard the ark? Not two but seven. Why do you suppose he had more clean animals than unclean? Because he had to use them right away for sacrifice, therefore he had to have a greater supply of these animals to preserve their genes. So the last point here is in Gen 8:21, "And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma of" that sacrifice, and obviously He was satisfied. What was he satisfied by? The smell of Noah? The smell of the animals? Probably not, I don't think the ark smelled too good right about then. God isn't interested in smelling them, He's smelling the sacrifice that was given to Him, that's what makes Him satisfied, not their BO. So we have the founding sacrifice.

To review what we've seen today. The fourth great event of Scripture is the New World Covenant. We defined a covenant as a "contract" between two parties in which the behavior of the parties can be measured for faithfulness. Only the God of the Bible ever entered into a covenant with His people. This establishes the Bible as basically a legal document designed to track God's behavior and demonstrate His faithfulness. In the New World Covenant is the basis for all other covenants. The parties are He and all flesh. The sign is the rainbow. The terms

are no destruction of all flesh and no global flood. The founding sacrifice was Noah's. Next week we'll go into the implications of this covenant for stability in nature so that man can engage in science with predictable results.