

Covenant – Mosaic

HOCL

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Ok...a couple of weeks ago we took a look at the covenant God made with Abraham and as we look to this Mosaic Covenant today, I want us to take just a brief journey through the history between the when God made this covenant with Abraham through to the Mosaic Covenant.

The covenant that God made with Abraham was renewed with his son Isaac. In Genesis 26:3 God says to Isaac, "To you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham your father." And then to Isaac's son, Jacob, God appeared at Bethel (according to Genesis 28:13–15) and confirmed the covenant to him: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth . . . and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go." At the time Jacob may not have known that he would be going to Egypt and that for four hundred years his descendants would be slaves and that the promise would lie dormant until God confirmed it again with Moses.

From Misery in Egypt to Mosaic Covenant

But God's ways are seldom our ways, and it was his plan to carry his covenant people through the miseries of Egypt toward the promised land. That divine principle hasn't changed to this day: "If we *suffer* with him, we will be *glorified* with him" (Romans 8:17). But after a long dark night of Israel's history and soul, there was a NEW DAY! God calls Moses, and with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm God liberates his people from bondage. They cross the Red Sea on dry ground. They receive food from the sky and water from the rock. And in three months they arrive at Mount Sinai. Here God makes a solemn covenant with Israel to confirm the covenant he made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

Virtually all of Exodus 19–34 is concerned with the making of this covenant. I want you to see this morning,

1. how the covenant was established, and then
2. what divine promises and human conditions make up the covenant, and
3. how it leads on in God's plan to the work of Jesus Christ.

A. How Was This Covenant Established?

Let's walk through these crucial chapters together. I'll point out the main features as we go. In Exodus 19:3 Moses goes up the first time into Mount Sinai, and God announces to him the general terms of the covenant in verses 5 and 6: If you obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my special possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Moses goes down, reports to the people, and in verse 8 they accept the covenant: "All the Lord has spoken we will do." Moses returns with this acceptance to the Lord, and in verse 9 the Lord says that he is coming to speak in earshot of the people so that they will believe Moses.

In Exodus 19:10–15 God instructs Moses to consecrate the people. In three days they are to approach the mountain. In three days the Lord descends in fire and the mountain is wrapped in smoke. God calls Moses to the top (v. 20) and sends him down again with the warning to the people not to break through and perish (vv. 21, 24). Then God himself addresses the people in 20:1–17 and gives the ten commandments. The people are so terrified at the voice of God that (in vv. 18–19) they plead with Moses, "You speak to us and we will hear,

but let not God speak to us lest we die." So in 20:21 Moses draws near to the thick darkness and receives the rest of the ordinances from the Lord. These are given in chapters 21–23 and include a lot more specifics than the ten commandments.

In Exodus 24:1–2 God tells Moses to get the priests and the elders and to come up on the mountain. But first in Exodus 24:3 Moses reports all the ordinances to the people, and again they accept the terms of the covenant: "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do." Then Moses writes the words he had received in a book (v. 4), builds an altar, sacrifices several oxen, and seals the covenant with blood. He throws some blood on the altar, reads the book to the people, and throws some blood on the people (vv. 5–8). The implication is probably that the people are taking an oath that if they break the covenant, their blood will be shed like the oxen's and it will be on their own head.

Then (in Exodus 24:9–10) Moses and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders went up the mountain partway and had a feast and saw God's glory. But in verse 12 the Lord calls Moses further up to receive the "tables of stone" written by God. So Moses went up into the cloud (v. 18) and remained forty days. Chapters 25–31 give the message God spoke to Moses, mainly a plan for the tabernacle to be built and for the ministry of the priests. When he was done speaking, God gave Moses the two tables of testimony (31:18) to carry back to the people—a kind of personally signed covenant document from the Lord.

But during the forty days the people had already broken their covenant promise and made an idol. In Exodus 32:8 God says, "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them." Moses prays for the people and God withholds his destruction (32:11–14). When Moses comes down to the camp (v. 19), he smashes the two tables of the covenant to show how the people have broken the covenant. The sons of Levi slaughter 3,000 men (32:28) and God sends a plague (v. 35) but the nation as a whole is spared through Moses' prayer.

Now the question is, what becomes of the covenant? They had broken it before it was even completed. If this covenant were based on works or on strict justice alone Israel would be done for. But to show that the covenant is based on grace, God renews the covenant and uses words which make this gracious foundation clear. In Exodus 34:1 God tells Moses to make a new set of stone tables and to come up again. In 34:6–7 God reveals himself and the basis of the renewed covenant: "The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, 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 children's children, to the third and fourth generation.'" Moses pleads in verse 9, "Pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for thine inheritance." And the Lord responds in verse 10, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation."

Then in 34:27–28 the Lord concludes this last meeting on Mt. Sinai like this: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Write these words; in accordance with 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 tables *the words of the covenant, the ten commandments*." And he came down with his face shining because of his time with God. The rest of Exodus reports the building of the tabernacle.

This is how the covenant was established!!

B. Now from that overview of how the covenant was established between God and Israel we can answer our second question: what are the divine promises and human conditions of this covenant? What does God commit himself to do? And what does he require of his covenant partner?

First, the promises. There are at least five.

1. Israel Will Be God's Prized Possession

In Exodus 19:5 God says, "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all the peoples; for all the earth is mine." God mentions that *all* the earth is his to show that when he calls Israel his "own possession," he means more than the general care and authority he has over the world. He will be Israel's God and they will be his possession in a special way. They will have blessings beyond all other nations. They will be God's prized possession—*if* they keep his covenant.

2. Israel Will Be a Kingdom of Royal Priests

Exodus 19:6 says, "and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests." The most striking privilege of the priests was intimate access to God. They drew near on behalf of the people. Their inheritance was not the land but the Lord. This privilege God promises to the whole nation. This privilege is heightened when God calls them a *royal* priesthood or priests in the services of the *King*. There is no greater privilege than to have intimate access to the King of the universe.

3. The third promise of the covenant in 19:6 is that Israel will also be a "holy nation." Israel would be holy in two senses: one, she would be set apart and distinguished from all the other peoples; two, she would be granted a moral likeness to God. She would share God's character. "Be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). *If* Israel keeps covenant with God, she will have the all-satisfying privilege of likeness to God. She will be a *holy* nation.

4. God Will Defend Israel from All Her Enemies

This is found in Exodus 23:22. "But if you hearken attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries." Like the cat who bites into a mouse and discovers it is a dog's paw. Anybody who opposes Israel will have to deal with almighty God—*if* Israel keeps covenant. This is probably what God means in Exodus 34:10 when he promises, "I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord." In defense of his people God will do marvels to display his glory among the nations.

5. Finally, and as the foundation to everything else, **God promises to be merciful and gracious and forgive iniquity and transgression and sin.** Exodus 34:6–7 are among the sweetest gospel words in the Bible. The fact that they come from Mt. Sinai and not Mt. Calvary, the fact that they preface the ten commandments (34:28) and not the book of Romans shows that the message of Christ and the message of Moses are the same message of grace. "The Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.'" So the fifth great promise of the Mosaic covenant is that God will treat Israel with mercy and grace and will forgive her sins—if she keeps the covenant.

In summary, then, five divine promises of the Mosaic covenant, which reconfirm the covenant with Abraham, are

1. that Israel will be God's special possession,
2. Israel will be a kingdom of priests to God,
3. Israel will be a holy nation,
4. God will fight for Israel and overcome all her enemies, and

5. God will treat Israel with grace and mercy and forgive her sins.

These are the divine promises of the covenant. But they all depend on certain conditions being fulfilled by the people, as Exodus 19:5 says, "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall . . ." experience all these divine blessings.

So now we want to look at the human conditions that must be met in order to enjoy the covenant blessings.

1. First, we need to know that the covenant was Founded on Grace and Offers Forgiveness

One thing is clear from the outset. The condition is not sinless perfection. The Mosaic covenant does *not* teach that if you commit a sin, you forfeit the covenant blessings. It says that the Lord forgives iniquity and transgression and sin (Exodus 34:7). The foundation of the covenant is grace. Therefore, when Exodus 19:5 says that Israel must "obey God's voice and keep God's covenant," it does not mean they must earn their blessings by working for God. It means they must keep themselves in an attitude to receive God's grace and mercy and forgiveness.

2. Second, the covenant is founded on Loving God and it's not about Earning Grace?

In Exodus 20:5–6 in the midst of the ten commandments, it says, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who *hate* me, but showing steadfast love (*KJV*: mercy) to thousands to those who *love* me and keep my commandments." Israel upholds her side of the covenant by loving God and by not putting any other value where God belongs in her heart. And out of this love to God inevitably flows an obedience to his word, because you always go after what you value. So this obedience is not *earning* God's grace. It is the *evidence* of love for God's grace. God is not loved when we put ourselves in the position of an employee and him in the position of an employer who pays us earnings.

When God says that love for him is the condition Israel must meet in order to share the covenant blessings, it's like saying that the condition you must meet in order to benefit from your vacation is to enjoy the sunsets. It is unthinkable that the command to love God could be a command to *earn* blessings from him. When you think it through, the command to love a God who is gracious and forgiving (Exodus 34:6–7) must include a command to *trust* him. The only way to receive forgiveness is by trusting the forgiver. And the only way to benefit from gracious promises is to trust the promiser. The fundamental condition that Israel had to meet in order to enjoy God's blessing was trust.

3. The 3rd condition is about Israel's Failure of Unbelief

Again and again in the Old Testament the rebellion of Israel against the covenant is traced back to unbelief (Numbers 14:11; Deuteronomy 1:32; 9:23; 2 Kings 17:14; 2 Chronicles 20:20; Psalm 78:22, 32; 106:24). For example, Psalm 78:22 looks back and says that God's anger flamed against Israel in the wilderness "because they had *no faith in God*, and *did not trust his saving power*." And Hebrews 3:19 says that the reason the wilderness generation did not enter the promised land was *unbelief*. Or as Hebrews 4:2 says, "The message which they heard did not benefit them because it did not meet with faith in the hearers."

(Summary) So there are at least three reasons to conclude that the basic condition required from Israel is faith.

1. First, because the covenant is renewed on the basis of grace and offers merciful forgiveness for sins (Exodus 34:6–7). Forgiveness can only be received by faith.
2. Second, God promises mercy to all who love him (Exodus 20:6). But loving God is just the opposite of trying to earn wages from a heavenly employer. Loving God must include delighting in his trustworthiness as one who "bore you on eagles' wings (out of Egypt) and brought you to himself" (Exodus 19:4).
3. Third, numerous Old Testament and New Testament passages say that the root of Israel's disobedience was her failure to trust God. Therefore, the obedience required in the Mosaic covenant is the obedience which comes from faith.

It's the same obedience required in the Abrahamic covenant when the Lord said to Abraham, "By your descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed *because you have obeyed my voice*" (Genesis 22:18). And it's the same obedience required in the new covenant under which we live. Hebrews 5:9 says of Christ that "Being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who *obey him*." The Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, and the covenant that Jesus sealed with his own blood are all various expressions of one great covenant of grace. And under all these covenants, expressed in many different ways, one thing is required of man in order to inherit the covenant blessings: "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

OK, so let me wrap it here today with this question....

C. How Can So Much Grace Come by This Covenant?

How can a righteous God simply forgive iniquity and transgression and sin? How can a judge just let guilty sinners go free? Surely the sacrifices of bulls and goats are no just satisfaction for all the dishonor heaped on God's name by Israel's sins. Again the answer lies in the future. Isaiah saw it most clearly and said, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). How could a just God, under the Mosaic covenant, be so gracious and forgive so freely?

Answer: HE LOVES US!!!!!!!!!!!! He looked forward to the coming of his Son and the sacrifice that repairs all the injury done to God's honor through the disobedience of his people. There could have been no covenant with Abraham, no covenant with Moses, and no new covenant without the coming of Jesus Christ. What was freely given under Moses was purchased by Christ.

If you want a fresh glimpse of Jesus to help you trust him and love him and obey him, consider these two things. First, every forgiven sin from Adam to the end of the age was laid on the innocent Christ and crushed him to hell. He accepted it willingly for the glory of his Father and the good of his people. Second, if you trust him and follow him in the obedience of faith, then you are the heirs not only of God's covenant with Abraham but also God's covenant through Moses. *You* are God's special possession. *You* are a kingdom of priests. *You* are a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9, 10). God opposes *your* enemies with wonder-working power. And to *you* he is now and always will be "the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."

"No eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Prayer