



Jan. 15th - Jan. 21st

WEEK 3 BIBLICAL COVENANTS | WHAT ARE THEY?

As we saw last week, God answers the question Genesis 1 - 11 poses, namely - "How will the world be restored" by promising Abraham and Sarah a huge family (as numerous as the stars in the sky), and a plot of land to live in. By doing so, He will establish them as a great nation that will one day help set the world right. But in a dark and ominous scene recorded in Genesis 15, God warned that this road to glory wouldn't be easy:

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the Lord said, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."
-Genesis 15:12-16-

By the time of the great Exodus, which we will discuss next week, it's been nearly 700 years since God made his covenant with Abraham and the promise of being a great nation couldn't feel further from reality. As the first book of the bible closes, the reader is left with the impression that the call to biblical faith is a journey filled with hope, frustration, wrestling, weeping, and doubt.

But before we go any further lets take a closer look at the biblical idea of covenant. It will be paramount to our grasp of the rest of the story...

“Covenant” is the English translation of a Hebrew (berit) and Greek (diatheke) word that describes a formal relationship between two parties who agree to a set of promises so they can work together toward a common goal.

There are a number of stories in the Bible where people make covenants with each other:

ABRAHAM & ABIMELEK	...make an agreement about access to wells for watering animals.	GENESIS 21:22-34
ISAAC & ABIMELEK	...make an agreement to have peaceful relations and not attack each other.	GENESIS 26:25-32
DAVID & JONATHAN	...make an agreement to protect each other from Saul.	1 SAMUEL 23:13-18
DAVID & ELDERS OF HEBRON	...make an agreement that they will follow David and acknowledge him as king.	1 CHRON. 11:1-3
SOLOMON & HIRAM	...make an agreement to keep their kingdoms in peaceful and productive.	1 KINGS 5:10-12

These stories show how covenants can fulfill many different purposes and involve a greater goal the parties will work towards. Tracing the one's God makes in the Old Testament will help us understand His character and reveal how those promises culminate in a New Covenant He initiates.

Group Resources

Read: Genesis 8 & 9; Genesis 12, 15 & 17; Exodus 19 - 24; 2 Samuel 7; Psalms 72, 89 & 132; and Luke 22:7-22.

Video: [The Covenants](#)

Sermon: Rescue from Ourselves | Holy Handicap!

Proposed Group Agenda (2 hrs):

Fellowship/Connection Time (30 min.)	Dig In (45 min.)
Welcome & Opening Prayer (5 min.)	Grow (10 min.)
Warm Up (10 min.)	Closing Prayer (5 min.)
Video (15 min.)	

* The individual reading plan for this week covers Genesis 46 - EXODUS 15 AND PSALMS 15-21.



Warm Up

Discussion Ground Rules (Worth Repeating...)

VCC's small groups are not meant to be only bible studies or places for theological debate. Mainly, they are safe spaces where people from every part of the faith spectrum can gather and practice living out 1 Peter 3:8 (take a moment to read it), and learn what it is to be part of the family of God. This means learning to live together in unity, sympathy, love, empathy and compassion.

With this in mind, discussion should be open and without judgment. We never want to belittle or degrade another person's experiences or questioning. We welcome people in the love and grace of Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to move on each person's heart. If you feel strongly opinionated about a subject or statement, approach the conversation with humility and grace - always ready to admit that you might be just a little bit wrong in your line of thinking. Remember, it's God's kindness that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Regardless of how long you have been walking with Christ, remember that none of us are experts on God and His ways. Throughout Scripture God is referred to, and even refers to Himself, as a mystery. So seek to understand before being understood. Don't assume you have everything about God or Scripture or miracles figured out. Avoid responding to one another by giving advice. Allow room for the Holy Spirit and for learning and growing together. And above all, have faith that the Holy Spirit is always at work in your group and its members.

If at any point, this week or in the future, someone breaks these ground rules, speak up and address it as a group.

Opening Question

Have you ever read all the way through the bible (Genesis - Revelation)? If so, share in one minute or less, what was most meaningful about the experience. If not, share in the same amount of time, what's kept you from reading it?

Dig In

Q. From tonight's video, name the one (1) implied and four (4) stated covenants we see God enter into in the Old Testament?

Answer: Implied - The Garden, Stated - (1) Noah, (2) Abraham, (3) Israel and (4) King David (all of which are outlined below):

THE GARDEN

While the word "covenant" is not used in Genesis 1-3, the relationship God initiates with humanity in the garden is very similar to a covenant:

GOD'S PART	HUMANITY'S PART
God provides the world-garden as a gift to humanity, and appoints them as divine image-bearers who will oversee it. GENESIS 1:26-28	Humans are tasked with caring for and cultivating the garden and to trust God's knowledge of good and evil over their own attempts to define right and wrong. GENESIS 2:15

THIS IS WHAT WE THINK GENESIS 2:16-17 MEANS, SEE THE GENESIS 1-11 VIDEO.

Humanity fractures the relationship by suspicion that leads to rebellion, which results in exile from the garden into a world where work and family are as much a burden as a blessing.


GENESIS 3

Q. Read back through the definition of “Covenant” on page 2, then review Genesis 8 - 9 about God’s covenant with Noah and all creation. Notice that God makes some big promises but asks for nothing in return. Why is this unique? What does this tell us about God’s purpose to save all creation?

NOAH

Genesis 8, 9

After purging his world of humanity’s evil, God makes a covenant with Noah and all creation, opening up a new future for God’s good world based on His promises.

GOD’S PART	NOAH & CREATION’S PART
<p>God promises that despite humanity’s continued tendency towards selfishness and evil, he will not destroy them or his world like this ever again. Rather, the earth will become a reliable place where God will work out His purposes to rescue everyone and everything.</p> <p>GENESIS 8:18-21, 9:8-11</p>	<p>Nothing. God doesn’t require a darn thing. He just states his promise and signs it with a rainbow.</p> <p>GENESIS 9:12-17</p> 

“As long as the earth endures , seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

GENESIS 8:22

Q. Review Genesis 15, God's covenant ceremony with Abraham. Notice that Abraham is asleep on the ground while God performs the ceremony by himself. Why is that significant? What does it tell us about God's purposes and how they will be fulfilled?

ABRAHAM

Genesis 12, 15, and 17

God selects Abraham from among the nations scattered at Babylon, and makes promises to him that will eventually restore His blessing to all humanity.

GOD'S PART	ABRAHAM'S PART
<p>God promises to bless Abraham, meaning that he will have a huge family that will inherit a promised piece of land in Canaan. And somehow, God will bring his blessing to all humanity through his family.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">GENESIS 12:1-3, 6-7</p> <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; padding: 5px; margin-top: 20px; width: fit-content;"> <p style="text-align: center;">A SYMBOL THAT THIS FAMILY'S FERTILITY AND FUTURE LAY IN GOD'S HANDS.</p> </div>	<p>Abraham is asked to respond to God's promises in a number of ways:</p> <p style="text-align: right;">GENESIS 9:12-17</p> <div style="background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;"> <p>Trust God's promises and follow him wherever he leads.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">GENESIS 12:1, 15:1-6</p> </div> <p>Train up his family to do what is just and right by following God's commands.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">GENESIS 18:16-19</p> <div style="background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;"> <p>Circumcise all males in his family as a "sign of the covenant"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">GENESIS 17</p> </div>

THE GREATER GOAL

God repeats His promises to Abraham and His descendants that through his family, somehow, He's going to bring His blessing upon all nations.

GENESIS 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14

Q. Read Exodus 19:4-6, God's words to Israel about His covenant with them. What are the implications of Israel being a kingdom of priests and holy nation? What do priests do? What does it mean for Israel to be a nation of priests to other nations? Look up 1 Peter 2:9-10 and see how Peter uses this language to describe the new covenant family of Jesus' disciples.

ISRAEL

EXODUS 19-24

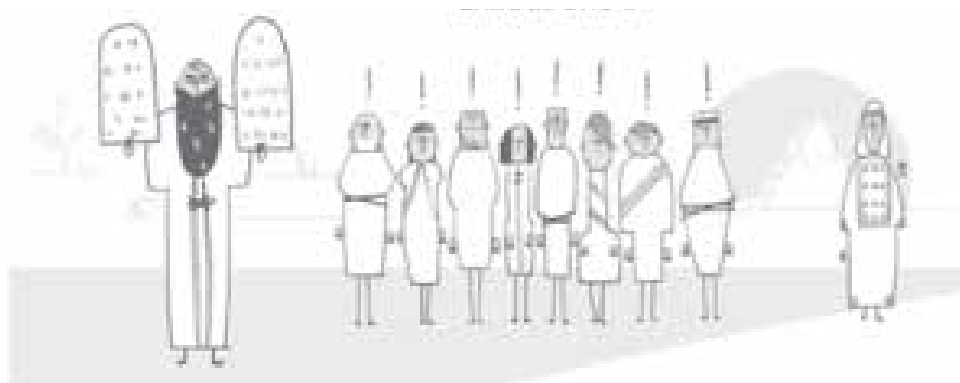
God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt and promises to make them into a kingdom of priests that he will use to show himself to all nations.

GOD'S PART	ISRAEL'S PART
<p>He rescued them by His grace, and promises to come and personally dwell in our midst and bring them into the land promised to Abraham.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">EXODUS 3:7-20</p>	<p>Obedience to the terms of the covenant embodies in the laws given by God at Mt. Sinai (including the 10 commandments).</p> <p style="text-align: right;">EXODUS 20-23</p>

THE GREATER GOAL

God has chosen Israel as a covenant people to make them into a priestly nation that will follow Him and so represent God's character to all nations.

EXODUS 19:1-6



Q. Recall God's covenant with David (1 Samuel 16 - 2 Samuel 6) then read Psalm 72. This poem is all about the hope for a future king from David's line who will fulfill the goals of the covenants with Abraham and Israel. How so? What parts of the poem connect with these previous covenants?

DAVID

2 SAMUEL 7 and PSALMS 72, 89, 132

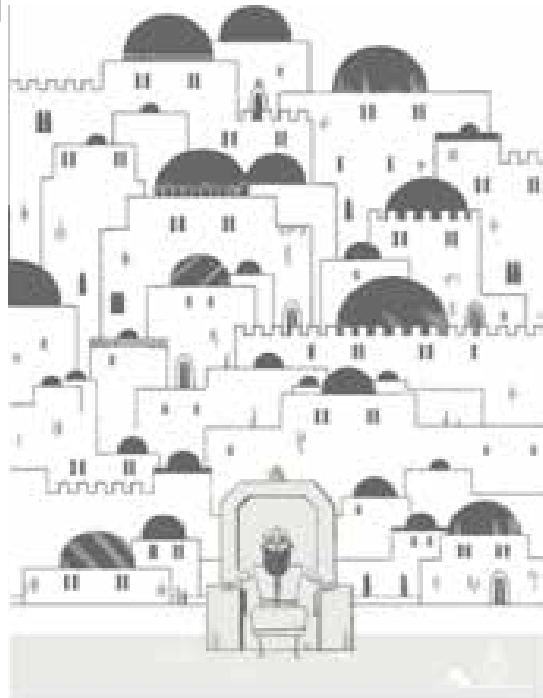
God establishes David as the king over Israel and promises that the promises to Abraham and Israel will be fulfilled in his royal lineage.

GOD'S PART	DAVID'S PART
<p>He will make David's name great and keep Israel in the promised land and after David dies he will raise up a descendant who will build a temple and a kingdom that will last forever.</p> <p style="text-align: right; margin-top: 20px;">2 SAMUEL 7:10-16</p>	<p>He and his descendants must remain faithful to God and lead all Israel in obedience to the laws of the covenant.</p> <p style="text-align: right; margin-top: 20px;">PSALM 132:11-12</p>

THE GREATER GOAL

God will use this future descendant of David to bring the kingdom of God of justice and peace over all nations, so that the blessing of Abraham may come to all people.

PSALM 72:1-7



Q. Recall to memory what you know about the Israelites in the Promise Land and the behavior of their kings (Joshua - 2 Kings). Why do they lose their land and get sent into exile in Babylon?

EXILE AND THE NEW COVENANT

The story of Israel in the promised land is told in the books of Joshua thru 2 Kings. Israel fails to live by the terms of the covenant, and their kings are unfaithful to the covenant made with David.

Israel loses their land and is sent into exile in Babylon.

2 KINGS 17, 24-25

However, Israel's prophets looked forward to a day when God would still fulfill all His covenant promises to fulfill the greater goal of blessing and hope for all nations.

ISAIAH

...still hoped for a future king from the line of David who would come and establish God's kingdom over all nations.

ISAIAH 9, 11

...and bring God's new "covenant of peace."

ISAIAH 54:10, 55:3

...and become a "light to all nations."

ISAIAH 42:1-7

JEREMIAH

...saw a day coming when God would make a new covenant and all of God's people would have their hearts transformed and be able to know and obey God from a place of joy and not duty.

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

EZEKIEL

...looked for a day when God would place His own Spirit in the hearts of His people and empower them to love and obey the terms of the new covenant.

EZEKIEL 36:26-27



Where's Jesus?

Q. Read through Luke's account of Jesus' last Passover meal with His disciples (Luke 22:19-22). How does Jesus see his impending death as fulfilling the whole covenant storyline?

JESUS AND THE NEW COVENANT PEOPLE

Jesus saw himself as fulfilling these prophetic promises and called people to become part of the new covenant people. Jesus said his death would seal the new covenant and inaugurate God's kingdom and new covenant people.

MATTHEW 5-7, LUKE 4:14-20, 22:19-22

The Gospels all claim that Jesus is Israel's God become human to fulfill both God's part and Israel's part of the covenants:

COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

Jesus lives by trust in the Father and teaches his new family of disciples to do what is just and right, and so becomes a source of blessing for all nations.

MATTHEW 4, 5-7, 28:8-10

COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

Jesus is the truly obedient Israelite and empowers his followers to become truly obedient by following the lead of His Spirit.

MATTHEW 5:17-48
ROMANS 8:1-11

COVENANT WITH DAVID

Jesus is the king from the line of David...who inaugurates God's kingdom in his life, death, and resurrection, and promises that his Spirit will be present with His new covenant people to lead them into obedience.

MATTHEW 1
LUKE 24:36-38
HEBREWS 8-10

Jesus' disciples, now made up of all nations, are the family of Abraham, the new covenant people who follow the Spirit of Jesus into a life of freedom and blessing.

GALATIANS 3:23-29, 5:16-25



Grow

These questions are designed to help you look at yourself, be aware and honest about who you are in light of your interaction with Scripture, and consider any appropriate actions.

Q. Early in the story of the Bible, it would appear to enslaved Israel that God's plans have gone terribly wrong. And in the middle of it all, He's made Himself scarce for hundreds of years. Have you ever felt disappointed with life and God's role in it? What about being frustrated or hurt by His apparent absence?

Q. Though none of us have likely experienced physical and political slavery, Jesus said that "everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). In what ways are you in exile as a result of your personal sin? How is this slavery making you feel and what kind of an impact is it having on your life and faith?

* Study synopsis, information and questions generated directly from materials provided by Reality Church SF - Year of Biblical Literacy and The Bible Project.