

He Gave Us Prophets

Lesson 3

The People of the Covenant

Forum



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Forum

With

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Question 1:

In what ways were God's covenants with Adam and Noah more universal than later covenants?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

A lot of the time when Christians talk about the “covenant people of God” they have in mind, first, Christians because we’re living in the new covenant period, and we’re in the new covenant in Christ. And if they’re thinking about it a little more deeply than that, they might even say that Israel is the covenant people of God because God made national covenants with Abraham and Moses and David. But you know, in reality, every single human being is in covenant with God. And that’s something we often miss from the Bible. But the Bible lays a foundation for all the special things that God does through Israel, and then later on in the New Testament in the church, and that foundation is the fact that every human being, by virtue of being a human being, is in covenant with God. And we know that this is true because the Bible talks about Adam and Eve being in covenant with God. And we know this is true also because Noah was in covenant with God. Now, what’s unusual about Adam and Eve and Noah? It is the fact that all of the children of the earth come from them, first Adam and Eve and then Noah. And so, what this tells us is that, in a general sense, in a very broad sense, just being a human being means that you are in covenant with God, which means that God shows kindness to you. It means that God requires loyalty, grateful loyalty, from you. And it means there are going to be consequences, as he wishes, as he deems to do it, consequences that are positive blessings and consequences that are negative curses. And these things work out, not just for the special covenant people of God — Israel and the church — but they work out for human beings in general. Every nation on the earth is responsible before God. Every nation on earth has received mercies from God, and every nation on earth receives the consequences of loyalty and disloyalty to God as he pleases to mete them out. And so, it’s very important to realize that the Bible begins its history of God making

covenants with people, with covenants in Adam and Noah that apply to every single human being that's ever lived on the planet.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

As you look at the Old Testament it's important to understand some of the covenants that are at work... So, you have Adam, you have Noah, then Abraham, Mosaic, and Davidic, new covenant. Okay, so that's the big sweep of them. Then some covenants are broader in scope. For example, the Davidic covenant is quite narrow because it's making a promise for a Davidic king. But if you think about what goes on with Adam in the garden — now there's a debate about whether this is actually a covenant or not, but what you clearly have is a command being given to Adam, and there are implications, consequences for him. "If you obey my commandment," he's going to be able to stay there, but if he disobeys, and he eats from the fruit, then there's going to be judgment, and the judgment is death that's going to come, and it will be exile. So, that particular command being given to Adam has widespread significance for the whole Old Testament narrative, because not only is it given to an individual Adam, but the *term* for Adam is also a corporate identity, because the word for humanity is also "*adam*." So, therefore, there is the sense of a corporate identity in individual Adam, which Genesis picks up in a number of ways. One of the ways it does is that it has the pronouns that are used with Adam move between singular and plural in Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 5:1-3. So, there's that sense of somehow individual Adam represents humanity. You also have the fact that when God says to Adam that "on the day you eat of it you will surely die," that's singular. So, it's referring to a singular Adam, yet the genealogy shows that his descendants die — "and he died... and he died... and he died..." So, that's underscoring the corporate identity of Adam and its implications for humanity. So, it impacts their story. And, of course, we also know from Adam that that narrative not only anticipates Israel's story, but it's also a type of him who was to come. Romans 5 puts it even bigger scale and says not only does it represent humanity, but he is also representing, anticipating, the work of Christ in his obedience, because he's a type of him who was to come. So, it's got enormous significance.

Dr. Mike Ross

In the covenant of grace there are obviously what we would see as more national covenants, like with Abraham and Moses and David, but prior to those there were two, what we would call, "universal covenants" with Adam and then with Noah... So, these two covenants, with Adam and with Noah, make wonderful promises to mankind. The first one is that God will send the seed of a woman, one of Eve's descendants, a human being who will be our Savior; this is the God-man Jesus Christ. And he promises Noah that despite how wicked the world becomes — and it is increasingly becoming more wicked as time goes on — he will never again destroy it with some catastrophic flood or some natural judgment as he did in the days of Noah... So, these two covenants ... look at a much broader audience and a broader work of God in the salvation of the world than even the more national covenants with Abraham and Moses and David.

Question 2: What is the covenant of works?

Dr. David VanDrunen

The covenant of works is a doctrine that was developed in the early centuries of the Reformed theological tradition, and there are several aspects of it that I think can summarize what it was getting at. For one thing, it affirms that at the beginning, when God created man, that he entered into a covenant with him. And so, this covenant of works refers to God's original relationship with Adam. So, what it's affirming is that, just as later in history, God entered into covenant with his people in various ways at various times, so even before the Fall, God actually entered into this special relationship, a covenant relationship, with Adam. So, that's one aspect of this doctrine. A second aspect of this doctrine is captured in that term "works." And what this teaches is that, in this covenant, God required Adam to be obedient and that he was going to deal with Adam according to his obedience or disobedience. And perhaps it's helpful to see this in comparison with how God deals with us his people now. God doesn't offer us salvation, he doesn't offer us eternal life, according to our good works. He offers it to us by faith in Jesus Christ. Well, God didn't go to Adam at the beginning and offer him a mediator, didn't offer him a savior, didn't offer him someone who would do the work for him. What he said to Adam was, "You obey me, and if you don't obey me, you will die," with the implication that if he would obey, he would live. And so that's why it's referred to as the covenant of *works*, because it was based upon the degree of Adam's obedience, or whether or not he would be obedient to God's call. But there's one other aspect of the doctrine that I think is worth mentioning, and that is the idea that God did not originally intend the human race simply to live in the Garden of Eden forever and ever and ever. Now, this is a historic Christian idea. You can go back to Augustine, or John of Damascus, or Thomas Aquinas and you find this conviction that God actually desired to have human beings in his, we might say, in "eschatological fellowship," that he wanted human beings to be with him and rule with him, not only in the first creation but in a new creation. And so, the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works has ordinarily taught that if Adam had been obedient and had been faithful to the commission that God gave him, that God at some point, in some way, would have blessed him with life in the new creation. He wouldn't have had to die in order to get there, but through that obedience God would have blessed him and blessed all of us in Adam with the blessings of everlasting life.

Dr. Guy Waters

When we talk about the covenant of works, what we mean is that that covenant that God made with Adam operated on a "works" principle — do this and you will live. Or as God put it in the garden, "You are not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil for on the day that you eat of it you will surely die." That doesn't mean that we could not speak of God's generosity towards Adam in the garden... He placed him in a garden, he gave him run of it to eat of all the trees save

one. There was the goodness of God abounding all around him. So, even as we speak of a covenant of works, we need to stress that that covenant of works was given to Adam by a God who was demonstrating, in many ways and at all times, his goodness towards him.

Dr. Bruce L. Fields

Covenant of works, or what I sometimes refer to as the “Edenic covenant,” is one of these debatable areas in the realm of biblical and systematic theology. I know a theologian who I hold in high regard, Anthony Hoekema, though a Reformed theologian, would speak against the existence of the covenant of works. More recently, Michael Bird in his *Evangelical Theology* would also challenge the concept. Let’s just say I, with all due respect, I do return to the particular section of Genesis, verses 15-17, where the Lord is, kind of, giving a word to Adam to not eat of the Tree of Life, and there I think that, still, we have some basic covenantal framework. For example, I do think that you have essentially two parties there, God and Adam, which a fundamental element of covenant. You do have a stipulation — now mind you, it’s very simple in form, but we would expect that, I think, in Genesis, you see — but the basic stipulation is, don’t eat of the fruit; that there is also in the framework here a kind of promise of reward, though it’s stated in an opposite direction: “God says in the day that you eat of the fruit you shall die.” By implication, what is in play is that if you obey, you will live. And I can’t help but believe that in the particular framework of this encounter, that we can also understand life to be right relation with God, and death, at least initially, to be a broken relationship with God. So, I think you have, at least in a very, very fundamental way, certain characteristics of a covenant — parties, stipulation and the involvement of consequences or rewards if indeed obedience is followed through.

Question 3:

If God promised natural stability in his covenant with Noah, why do we still experience so many natural disasters?

Dr. Tim Sansbury

I think we have to distinguish — as we ask the question, why are there so many natural disasters, given the covenant with Noah that promised stability and promised there would never be a “flood,” really, if we bring it down to the exact words — but to distinguish between the kinds of things that we consider to be natural disasters today and what this biblical flood was... This was not a region of people who were affected. This was an event that affected every living and breathing being on the planet... As we understand Noah standing on the mountain after this event has occurred, he is confronted with, yes, having been saved by God from the flood, but he’s confronted with utter devastation. Everything that he knew, everyone that he knew, all of the world that he understood, it had all been destroyed. And so, while we talk about natural disasters today — and they are significant, and some of them are awful, and we should understand them to be significant and awful, and we should

hate them, and we should look forward to a future in which they're gone — it's not fair to call them contrary to the promises made to Noah because these natural disasters are not coming on the heels of sin that is global sin throughout the human race... It's not God taking care or eliminating all but one little tiny remnant and wiping the face of the earth clean of man and beast. And surely plant life as well was totally different than it had ever been. We should then, as we look at the modern issue, while not being concerned that it breaks the covenant with Noah, we should wail, we should be horrified, we should recognize that, in this world in which God has brought stability, that those forces which move the earth and bring us good, at times they also bring us great harm, that the wind and rain which water the plants can also be so extreme that they steal homes and that people lose their life. And so, we can look forward to a future in which those things won't occur. We can recognize them as signs of the curse and as problems that arise only from the Fall, but we don't have to see them as contradictory to God's promises that he has made his people. The flood and the impacts of the flood were far beyond the localized natural disasters that we experience today

Pastor Doug McConnell

Well, God did make a promise that seedtime and harvest and the rains would come and all of that to Noah, but in the background of that story, what had just happened was, he had flooded the earth. He had destroyed the earth with water so that nothing was left alive except for those that were in the ark and the animals with them. And so, the promise specifically was that he would not destroy the world with a flood... We do have regular seasons; we don't have a worldwide catastrophe like what had happened in Noah's day. But I think it's important that we understand that there is a connection between the earth and men who live upon it. The earth was put under dominion of mankind, and because of it, the earth feels the weight — as it says in Isaiah — of our sin... And of course, the Bible does talk about the lifting of the curse on the earth, doesn't it? Both in the Old Testament prophets it talks about a day when the deserts would blossom and bloom, and Paul reaffirms this in Romans 8, and he talks about the creation itself, as it were, on tiptoes waiting for the revelation of the sons of God, when the curse will be lifted from the earth. And so, we live in this era when the ground is still cursed, and I think it's interesting to know that, or understand that Jesus wore a crown of thorns because he bears the curse that was upon the earth, and when things are made right in the regeneration, that curse will be lifted from the earth and deserts will all blossom. And that's a day to look forward to.

Question 4:**How can people today serve as God's image and live out his mandate to fill the earth and rule over it?****Dr. Greg Perry**

This incredible mandate that the Lord gives to Adam and to Eve that they would bear God's image by multiplying that image in the world and then taking dominion over the earth, extending the borders of the garden throughout the whole earth, is a mandate that continues and that has been renewed and redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ. We see in the Great Commission — this commission to go into all the nations and to preach the gospel, the good news about the kingdom of God coming through Christ's death and resurrection — but he talks there about teaching them to obey all the things that I've commanded you, and it deals with all areas of life. If we read back through the Gospel of Matthew we see that Jesus taught about money, that he taught about how to relate to the poor, how to relate to the Samaritans, people who weren't of the same race, for example. And we're reminded that this commission — sometimes called the "cultural mandate," in Genesis 1 and 2 — indicates that all of life is sacred; every dimension of life, family life, business life, our life as citizens. Indeed, Moses uses the language that God put them in the garden "to serve and to keep it." It's the same language that he will use again in Numbers 3 to talk about the Levites and how they are to care for the tabernacle. And so, the Bible knows no distinction between "sacred" and "secular." All of life comes under the reign of God. And this incredible *cultural* mandate is that we will create and make culture in a way that shows the Creator and how God made the world and intended for us to relate to him, each other, and to the world. Well, as we follow Jesus in every area of life, Paul picks up this language in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 and he talks about putting on the new self, the new humanity, and it's very Adamic language. It's referring back to the original mandate that was given to Adam and to Eve. And so, as we read through Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, we see Paul discipling the Ephesians and the Colossians in every area of life — "Whatever you do, do it as unto the Lord and not unto men." And so, we continue to carry out that cultural mandate as we follow Jesus and make disciples in every dimension of life.

Pastor Doug McConnell

Well, that mandate to fill the earth, subdue it and to rule over it was one that was given to Adam in the beginning, the creation mandate, and it was reaffirmed again to Noah later on when humanity started again, as it were... I think it's important we understand that God's intent was to fill the world with those who bear the image of God to the glory of God. And it's interesting because in Hebrews ... when it talks about this mandate and man and his place, and the Son of Man, Jesus, and it talks about the subduing of the earth, and it says, now we don't see it, but we do see Jesus who is our "author and the perfecter of our faith," who has gone ahead of time to do this. And so, I think there is going to be a final subduing of the earth through Christ, the second Adam, and he is going to fill the earth with those who bear the image of God to the glory of God. But in the meantime, we do that to the degree that we spread

the gospel and bring people into glad and willing obedience to Jesus.

Question 5:

Why are God's covenants with Abraham, Moses and David understood to be more national in character?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

In his wisdom, God decided that he was going to work through one particular ethnic group and reach all of humanity through that group. And that group, of course, was the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel in many respects was like the “A” team, like the first-string team of the human race, not because they were better than anybody else, but because of God’s mercy toward their father, Abraham. And one of the ways in which God treated Israel special and prepared them for this role of reaching all the world with the good news, with reaching out and spreading the kingdom of God throughout all of the nations of the earth, was that he made covenants with particular people, with representative people in the nation of Israel. The first of those was with Abraham, of course, the father of the whole nation. He made covenant with Abraham and that covenant basically told what Israel’s role was and what God was going to do to make sure that they were able to fulfill that role and what responsibilities they had and what kind of consequences they faced as they would be faithful and unfaithful to him, those sorts of things, the normal sorts of things you find in a covenant. But then, later on, what God did was he reaffirmed and furthered that national covenant with Abraham by turning to the next big figure in the history of Israel, which of course is Moses, the one who delivered them from Egypt. And this too was a national covenant, this covenant that God made at Sinai. He gathered them around Sinai and he said, “You are a royal priesthood. You’re a kingdom of priests. You’re my treasured possession. You are mine. Now here is my great gift to you — the covenant of law.” Not a condemnation of them. It was not given to them to mess them up or to tell them how they were going to be failing, but rather, initially, it was given to them as a source of life — “Trust in the Lord and do good, and you shall dwell in the land and you will be fed.” You see, the law was given to them for goodness, for hope, for life, as the apostle Paul says even, in Romans 7. And then, after the days of Abraham, of course, as the nation of Israel was moving forward and becoming a kingdom that would then spread the kingdom of God throughout the world, the next big step was when God ordained that a particular family would be the dynasty that would rule over Israel forever, and that of course was the family of David. So, God made covenant with David as well. And when he made covenant with David, he promised that this was going to be the royal family, not just the royal family of Israel, but the royal family that would one day rule over every tribe and every nation on the earth, so that the Son of David would one day reign over every square inch of the entire planet. That was the kind of covenant dream that Israel had, that even from the days of Abraham, that they would one day become a blessing to all the nations. And this happened because God was making covenants with his people, with the nation of

Israel. And, of course, we know that Israel failed many, many times, and God was patient with them all through this process, but they failed miserably after this covenant with David. Even David's own house failed miserably. And as a result, Israel went through a period of discipline, a period of judgment — we often call it the “exile period” — and it extended for hundreds and hundreds of years until that great Son of David came, that great “second Moses,” that great son of Abraham came, and his name was Jesus. But all of this has to do with the nation of Israel, the nation of Israel as the means by which God would reach the world. And, even as New Testament believers, we know that this is true. Our Savior is Jewish. His apostles were Jewish. So, even the whole church of Jesus Christ is built on the foundation of Israel. And Gentiles, as they come in, they are adopted into this family of Israel, and so these national covenants given to Israel are not just for Israel, but they are vital to our faith in Jesus as well.

Dr. Mike Ross

God's covenant of grace is one huge covenant. It lasts from Genesis 3 and the fall of mankind to the very end of history, but it unfolds progressively in stages. When we come to Abraham, and then followed by Moses and David, you have this covenant of *promise* with Abraham, the covenant of the *law* with Moses, and the covenant of the *kingdom* with David, God is kind of narrowing down his covenantal focus to a specific people, Israel, the Jews, the Hebrews... And so, he's forming this covenant more and more around this people, stronger and stronger to kind of hedge these people in so that they are not defiled by the nations around them, by their idolatry and immorality and wicked ways. That's why these prophets come along, and they speak very forcefully about the way Israel has been polluted by these things. They're not just concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Old Testament people; they're concerned about the Christ who will be born... So, this covenant of grace focuses down on this people of Israel for the sake of Jesus Christ, and then after he has died and risen from the grave, this covenant opens up again into the new covenant and expands to the ends of the earth. So, you kind of see this broad covenant with Adam and Noah, narrowing down to the phases of the covenant with Abraham and Moses and David, and then opening up again, almost like an hourglass, to take in the nations of the world. And that's why they're very nationalistic. They're rooted in Hebrew life and laws. They're rooted in the temple. They're dependent upon the kingship of David in particular because this is the time in which God is creating a special incubator into which will be born ... Jesus Christ, for the sake of the whole world eventually.

Question 6:

How did Old Testament prophets depend on Moses' covenant?

Dr. Carol Kaminski

When we look at the message of the Prophets, we don't want to think of a prophet as bringing out a lot of new ideas. They're not creative. They're going back to the

Mosaic covenant, and they're going back to the terms of the covenant. And so, what's very interesting is when you look at certain prophets you will find certain terms only appear in an Old Testament book and then in the prophet. For example, in the prophet Ezekiel, he will use language from Leviticus 26 to describe the coming judgment. And some terms are only in Leviticus 26 and in Ezekiel, and it's showing that clear connection between the two and really saying, for Ezekiel, Leviticus in particular was the grid — of course, Ezekiel is a priest — so it's the grid through which he's describing both the judgment and the hope of restoration. You could look at Jeremiah. Jeremiah's going back to Deuteronomy often, and he's appealing — I mean, he quotes Deuteronomy 27 in one of his classic passages in Jeremiah 11 — he quotes it directly and he says, the law says, “cursed is anyone who does not keep all the things written in the law,” and he is reading this and says, “Remember what Moses had commanded you.” And so, their vocabulary is coming from the Mosaic covenant, their categories about how they're describing it. And it also helps us, because when we read like about locusts, or when we read about some, “You will be as dung on the face of the earth,” or “You're going to be eaten by the birds,” when we're reading the Prophets, you sort of think, okay, what is that all about? Going back to the curse language of the Mosaic covenant helps us to understand the context of it and not read these prophetic books in isolation from the Old Testament narrative.

Dr. Todd Berger

The Old Testament prophets had a good view of time so that they were able to look to the past, they were able to live in the present, and then look ahead to the future. The prophets depended on God's covenant, in particular I'll say the Mosaic covenant. Let's kind of confine it to that. So, if we're talking about God's law that he gave at Sinai, for instance, that law that he gave provided the basis, the foundation for everything that the prophets were teaching the people. One of the problems that we see in the Prophets — and this has been a problem with critical scholars for, you know, well over a hundred years — is the fact that many of the prophets don't refer specifically to specific laws. We get some of that in Jeremiah where he seems to list off some of the Ten Commandments at times, but we don't get them just having these explicit discussions about the law at Sinai. And so, for many liberal scholars ... that has created problems. But if we look at it instead that they have the law at Sinai, that they assumed that all of their readers, all of their listeners, knew that, then we can look at this in a bit of a different light because now we have the prophets speaking to the people. They've got God's covenant. It's assumed that this is their basis for life. This is their basis for understanding the relationship with God, for instance. They can, then, preach to the people about the present situation, having that foundation in the past. This past, present and future terminology, I think, is helpful also with the prophets because what we're seeing is that the prophets were not just future fortune tellers. They didn't just tell things that happened in the future, but instead they were looking to the past; they saw God's acts, the things that he did on behalf of Israel in the past. They had that as a foundation for what they then preached to the people about their present situation. But then also, they were always looking ahead to the future, to what God was going to do in the future, perhaps through judgment, more often through restoration, through salvation of his people. And so, this view of the

prophets as having a past perspective to the covenants, a present perspective where they preach to the people to that age, and then a future view to what God was going to do in the future is very important to understanding the prophets.

Dr. Douglas Gropp

Probably the most important passage for understanding the role of the prophets in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 18:15-18, where Moses — reminiscing with the Israelites on the making of the first covenant at Mount Sinai, which he mediated — says that the Lord will raise up a prophet “like me” ... and he’s saying that future prophets are going to be in this same mediatorial role in relationship to this covenant that was made at Horeb, or as it says in the book of Exodus, the covenant made at Mount Sinai. The shape of the prophetic speeches, particularly the judgment speeches, which have often been called “covenant lawsuits,” are bringing to bear on Israel the actual terms of the covenant that the Lord made with Israel at Mount Sinai and renewed after Israel broke the covenant immediately with the sin of the golden calf, and broke the covenant again when they rebelled in the wilderness, when they heard the report of the spies coming back from the Promised Land in Numbers 13 and 14. That covenant was renewed in the book of Deuteronomy on the plains of Moab as a renewal of essentially the same covenant.

Question 7:**Why did God choose David’s royal line to be a permanent dynasty in Israel?****Dr. Russell T. Fuller**

Even from the beginning it was already chosen, God had already chosen Judah to be the tribe where... The rulers were going to come from Judah. And so, God had already chosen that. Now, originally the first king, though, was not chosen from there but chosen from Benjamin — Saul. And he looked like the king. He would have been, for Hollywood casting, it would have been Saul. He was taller than everyone, and when you look at him, that’s the way a king should look. But God said, “but man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the inward heart.” And what it says about David is that David was “a man after God’s own heart.” That’s why he chose him. And then the Scriptures also said that David’s heart was fully after the Lord; he was fully dedicated to the Lord in every way. And so, he wanted to build God a house. But when Nathan the prophet came back to him, God’s response was, “I’m going to build *you* a house, and it’s going to be an eternal house.” And by “house” there, he wasn’t talking about a temple. He was talking about an eternal dynasty. And even in Old Testament times they understood that, not that there was just going to be one king after another. Even just a few hundred years after David, under the prophet Isaiah, it was understood that this eternal dynasty was going to be through Messiah. So, Messiah would come through David. But if you notice, every king after David, he’s basically compared to David, and they’ll say, “He did right in

the eyes God, but he didn't fully follow after the Lord, like their father David did." So, David is the great example of what a king should be, and again, it's because of David's heart toward the Lord. He was fully obedient toward God, and so this is why his house was chosen forever. And even though there's a warning that, if your sons disobey, I will punish them; for your sake, you will always have a person sitting upon the throne. And again, that was going to be seen as Messiah ultimately.

Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

When we think about the human kingship within ancient Israel, and we often think of, say, the term "Messiah" and how the Old Testament is filled with these great messianic hopes, what we need to keep in mind is that the Messiah, or the one anointed to serve in a really important role in God's kingdom, is actually an agent of God himself... So, quite clearly the expectation is that the human king would be obeying God as the divine king. Now, when we look at the reign of King David, it's remarkable that as soon as he is anointed as king over all of Israel... One of the first things he does is establish a capital city. And in that capital city, Jerusalem, the next move that David makes is, he has the ark of the covenant be brought to Jerusalem, and of course this happens with a great procession. And the ark of the covenant symbolizes God as king within Israel. So, by moving the ark of the covenant to the very center of the capital city of Israel and Judah, what we find is that the vision for Israel is that God himself is the one who's their king who should reign at the center of their entire nation. But this king, God, also has chosen to work with a Davidic king, and that's closely connected with David, where we see in the very next chapter after the ark of the covenant has been brought to Jerusalem, God promises that he will remain faithful to the line of David until the end of time.

Question 8:

How is the new covenant similar to and different from the covenants of the Old Testament?

Dr. Greg Perry

In Jeremiah 31, as we read about God's incredible promise to bring his people back into the land and to make a new covenant with the household of Judah and of Israel, we recognize echoes of language that we've heard before. In chapters 30–33, there's also this promise that David's son will once again sit on the throne. And so, the Davidic covenant is very clearly echoed there. And then, of course, the idea that God will put his law in the hearts of his people, that he will cleanse them, as we hear in the language of Ezekiel 36, which is also referring to this new covenant. And so, the Mosaic covenant is clearly echoed there. And then, of course, in the language of Isaiah and in the language of Ezekiel's reckoning of God's name, vindication of God's name to the nations — this idea that his people will once again be a light to the nations, be a blessing to the nations — well, that's very clearly referring to Abrahamic language. And then, of course, Isaiah and others also talk about even the

whole earth being renewed and springing forth with new life. And so, the covenant with Adam in creation and with Noah is also very clearly echoed in Jeremiah 30–33 and other passages in the Prophets that refer to the new covenant or this “eternal covenant of peace,” as Isaiah puts it. But, also, we have very clearly new things that are happening. There are things that are really *new* “new” about the new covenant. We hear that this new covenant will be constituted, not by law-giving as it was on Mount Sinai, but by the giving of God’s Spirit. And so, Spirit-giving, instead of law-giving, will constitute this new covenant. We also read that God will remember the sins of his people no more, that there will be a definitive dealing with sin, that God will make it so that this new covenant cannot be broken as it was in the past because sin will be definitively dealt with. We also read in passages like Ezekiel 34, and this word comes up in Jeremiah as well, that God will shepherd his own people himself, that the breaking of the old covenant was such that even the leaders of God’s people have been corrupt. And so, the Lord himself will shepherd his people. That’s going to be new. And then, lastly, we see that there’s going to be such a knowledge of the Lord all throughout the people of God and all throughout creation, this extensive knowledge of God, that people won’t even have to teach one another about the Lord. And so, we see that this new covenant is also going to constitute a new creation, a thoroughgoing knowledge of the Lord throughout all the world. So, there are things that are very similar about the Old Testament covenants; we hear the languages echoed. But there are these things that are also very new about the new covenant.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

So, as we start to interpret the new covenant it is helpful to understand a little bit about the old covenants, because when Jeremiah announces the days are coming when God will cut a new covenant, he says, it’s not like the old one that they broke. So, somehow you’ve got to understand the new covenant, and you’ve got to know what the old one is. And he’s really referring back to the Mosaic covenant, and we usually... There are other covenants in the Old Testament, but we often think about the contrast between Mosaic covenant and new covenant. The new covenant language is found in the book of Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 31. Jeremiah is living under the old covenant. That’s the time. And not only is he living under the old covenant, but King Josiah has been renewing the old covenant... And of course, the covenant that Jeremiah announces, it also says that the days are coming when God will “cut” a covenant. We use the language of “making,” but the Hebrew is “cut.” The Hebrew term “cut” implies the death of an animal ... right? To make a covenant you cut an animal, and Jeremiah is not explaining how this is going to happen, but he does use the language of cutting a covenant, suggesting blood. And of course, when Jesus at his last supper says, “Behold the blood of the new covenant,” and it’s *his* own blood that is going to inaugurate the new covenant, which is just a wonderful, wonderful gift of seeing what Jesus does in terms of inaugurating this new era. And then, if we look at it as Christians today, we’re not under the old covenant. Of course, Hebrews talks about this, Hebrews 8 and 9. We’re not under the old, the old is fading away, but we are under the new covenant, which is through Jesus, offering forgiveness for our sins — wonderful that we enter by faith and trust in Jesus who is the one who inaugurates. He’s the mediator of the new covenant, and he inaugurates it. So, it’s

wonderful that we're living in this time rather than living under the Old Testament and under the old covenant.

Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus

One thing to remember about all of the divine human covenants is that the Lord initiated them all. Another thing is that they are all gracious acts because they're gifts. They wouldn't exist if the Lord hadn't given them. They are also all conditional in some sense or other. Even the first man and woman had a condition. They had commands to obey; they had something that they were not to disobey, namely eating the fruit of the tree. And as you proceed on through Scripture, probably the most important two to consider are the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant. And the Mosaic covenant, again, it wouldn't have existed if the Lord hadn't given it, so it is a work of grace, but also it has conditions, and everybody knows this. The new covenant is also, of course, a wonderful gift. We are called to the obedience of faith... As Paul said, the law is holy and gracious and good, but ... the problem is that the law, the Mosaic covenant, gave you God's standards, but it didn't give you the power to obey them. And that's what you get in the new covenant. So, you get these promises even in the Old Testament, the old covenant material. Ezekiel 36:27 says at some future date — open-ended — I will put my Spirit in you and move you to obey my laws and decrees... But in Romans, Paul can speak of the circumcision of the heart, which is by the Spirit. And of course, the great passage in Jeremiah 31 where the Lord promises that he will write his law on their hearts, and that's what happens in the new covenant also by the Spirit. So, that's the tremendous difference between those two covenants. And of course, God's whole covenantal program after the Fall onwards is moving toward that new covenant.

Question 9:

What did God intend to convey to the nation of Israel through Hosea's marriage to Gomer and their children's names?

Dr. Carol Kaminski

So, in the book of Hosea, God is really trying to communicate his message to his people through Hosea's marriage as well as the children's names. And so, the marriage is representing this forsaking for other gods as his wife is forsaking him and for the sake of other lovers. That's kind of the imagery that's being used. But you also have it with these children. I mean, you have the first son being born called "Jezreel." Now, Jezreel, we might not know much about that name and think, you know, it's just an ordinary name, but if you're an Israelite and you're in the northern kingdom, this is a powerful term that's being used because it recalls key events that have happened in the northern kingdom, especially with King Ahab and Jezebel. And it recalls this event where Ahab had wanted this man's vineyard — Naboth — wanted his vineyard, and he wasn't able to get the vineyard, and so his wife Jezebel organizes these two false witnesses and basically has the guy killed, and then Ahab takes the

vineyard. And this is all taking place at Jezreel. And so, that happens there. There are several other events that happened at Jezreel, like terrible bloodshed that happens, including Jezebel getting killed, as well as Ahab's seventy sons and their heads get cut off and sent to Jezreel. So, as soon as you hear the word "Jezreel," it is bringing up these terrible events, and it is announcing God's judgment for what took place at Jezreel. And then you have two other terms... And you have the first one being Lo-Ruhamah is in Hebrew or "no compassion." I mean this is a terrible term when you think of it because God says he's no longer going to have compassion on his people. This picking up that there's going to be an exile coming; they've been worshipping idols since 930 B.C., so this means for almost 200 years they've been worshipping idols and God hasn't destroyed them because of his compassion. So, when he says, "Lo-Ruhamah," he's really pronouncing that judgment is coming and he's withdrawing his compassion. And then the last term, the last name is "Lo-Ammi," which means "not my people." And then again, this is very significant to the heart of the covenant relationship God made with Abraham — Genesis 17, "I will be your God; you will be my people." You think of it in the Mosaic covenant: "I will be your God, you will be my people." Now he's saying through this third child, Lo-Ammi, "You are no longer my people." And in fact, he's going to treat them like they're not his people. He's going to treat them like the nations, and so judgment's coming. I will mention that immediately after he says, Lo-Ammi, not my people, there is going to be hope that at the place where he said "not my people" they will be called "children of the living God" — wonderful little nugget of hope in the midst of that — and Paul's going to pick this up in Romans to say that this is the hope of the Gentiles coming in. So, you have judgment being pronounced but also this little window of hope of the future restoration.

Question 10: **What is the invisible church?**

Dr. Simon Vibert

The invisible church is the church that's made up of those who are known only to God as true believers — "the elect," as we might sometimes call them — those who will be part of the visible church, but of course, those who God knows are his. And they will be regular worshipers in the kind of congregations that are made up of the visible church, but they are the ones who God knows are eternally saved.

Dr. Mark L. Strauss

The "invisible church," then, refers to all the true followers of Jesus Christ, all those that have been justified through faith in God's grace, God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, and have come into a relationship with him. We form a worldwide community connected together by the Holy Spirit. All those who are true followers of Jesus Christ around the world, whatever their denomination, whether their a member of particular denomination or not, all true followers of Jesus Christ make up the

invisible church. You could even call it the “true church,” that is the true people of God in this world.

Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

In Christian theology, we’ve often spoken of the visible and invisible church. These terms can be very, very helpful, but they can also differ depending upon our theological backgrounds and heritages and our theological commitments. “Invisible church” probably is the term that is less disputed from among individual Christians, and it refers primarily to the fact that the church is universal. We cannot see all believers at one time because they are not only from the remnant and the people in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament era of all times, all places. So we speak of Christ’s universal body, his people that encompasses all those various times and places, and “invisible” is a good term that refers to that.

Question 11:

Why did the prophets so frequently call Israel to “circumcise their hearts” to the Lord?

Dr. Russell T. Fuller

The prophets did frequently call on Israel to “circumcise their heart” to the Lord. You see the first time in the Pentateuch where Moses commands them to circumcise their own heart. And, of course, when you think about it, that’s an impossibility. How can a person circumcise their own heart, you see? ... And so, if you look at Deuteronomy it’ll talk about “circumcise your heart,” and then just a few verses later what it’s going to say is that *God* will circumcise our heart. And so, that was what was needed in the Old Testament. Remember, in the Old Testament, the law was given upon stones. It was given externally. The key for the Old Testament was, how do you internalize it? The way to internalize the law is being described by the term “circumcision of the heart.” Now, we know circumcision was the great symbol and seal of the covenant of the Old Testament. But yet, what it really represented was the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s heart and what we would call today “regeneration.” Therefore, we become willing and able to try to obey God’s law, not perfectly, but yet, with the Holy Spirit’s help in a way that is acceptable to the Lord.

Dr. Imad Shehadeh, translation

A marvelous thing in God’s relationship with the ancient people is the Ten Commandments, but we also see that Scripture gives another side of God, which does not exist in other religions or in common human thought. It talks about the “circumcision of the heart.” This means that, even at the time God gave the Ten Commandments, there was another dimension, the circumcision of the heart. In other words, it is the need for the heart to be changed. For instance, if we read in Deuteronomy — which is the conclusion of what Moses did with the people and how

he revealed God and the Ten Commandments — Moses conveys, in Deuteronomy 30:6, this promise from God:

The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring (Deuteronomy 30:6).

It means that God is working. The Lord will perform surgery on your heart. In the New Testament, we call this “regeneration.” And why? So that you will love the Lord your God,

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

This is the same language that Jeremiah used when he said that God would write the law on our hearts. It is no longer just written on stones but written on hearts. This is the circumcision of the heart. This means that here, in the midst of God’s words concerning the required commands that require complete obedience, God says, “You are incapable of doing this if I don’t change your heart.” This means that the human need is not to have more knowledge. Our need is not to know the law more and the laws of “do’s” and “do not’s”; we know these. Our problem is that we need a new nature, and this is the circumcision of the heart. That is why the command says to circumcise your heart. In other words, confess that you are incapable, that you need the work of God in your heart. When I say, “circumcise your heart,” it means that you need to go to someone else to do it for you. You can’t do it by yourself. Of course, this happens; this is the foundation of the message of the gospel, through the cross of Christ.

Pastor Doug McConnell

I find it interesting that in the New Testament when Jesus encounters Nicodemus and mentions being “born again,” he seems befuddled by the question or the comment that Jesus makes. But Jesus, in his rebuke to him, mild as it was, suggested that he *should* know that. And yet, the idea of being born again is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but what is mentioned is being circumcised of heart, a heart change that’s necessary in order to fulfill what God wants in his commandments. And, of course, the commands can come to us, but they don’t give us a desire to keep them. And so, the command to circumcise their heart was to recognize that the real problem was their heart condition, their love for things other than God and his glory. And so, it was really a call to conversion, and as long as that did not happen, it was never going to be that Israel would be the nation, the people would be the people that God had called them to be. And so we learn in Moses, in his last address to the people, tells them that despite all the miracles they had seen, all the things God had done for them, they still did not believe because the Lord had not given them a heart to believe. But then it goes on to say that their children, the ones that they thought God would bring into the Promised Land and have them slaughtered, he would actually circumcise their heart so that they would believe. And you read God, in the Prophets, will look back at that

first generation that was in the desert as a faithful generation, and evidently it was because God had circumcised their hearts. And so, that's what's needed in the old covenant, and in the new covenant it's talked about in terms of being "born again."

Dr. Greg Perry

Sometimes we think that circumcision was really only something that the Jews practiced, but if you go into the British Museum, you'll see that circumcision was a very common practice throughout the ancient Near East. It was a practice that was mainly associated with dealing with fertility issues, making it possible to have more children by removing the barrier between husband and wife, removing the foreskin. But the Lord calls his people to circumcise their hearts because this is the symbol of his covenant with them, the covenant he gave to Abraham to circumcise himself and to circumcise his sons and every male servant in his household as a sign of his loyalty to the great king, the Lord. And God's people, though, like all of us, would grow insensitive to the Lord, would create barriers in their relationship with the Lord, and so the Lord reminds them to remove those barriers, to re-sensitize their hearts in order to have fruitful lives under his reign. And so, in Deuteronomy 10, we see God in the giving of the law as they go into the land say, "circumcise your hearts." And then in Deuteronomy 30, at the end of this covenant ceremony, we see the Lord remind them again to live lives where they're constantly removing the barriers between them and the Lord and wanting to be fruitful in their life in the land. But it's interesting, Deuteronomy 30 sort of foreshadows something that's going to come, and that is that God's people will fall away from the Lord, and they'll have to be removed from the land. And yet the Lord says, "*I* will circumcise your hearts." There's this shift in Deuteronomy 30 from their responsibility to do that in their daily lives and yet that the Lord will do that for them as well. And we see that even in the new covenant that God will put his Spirit in our hearts, give us a new heart, a sensitive heart of flesh, and remove the heart of stone. So, the language of circumcision is a very strong reminder of the covenant sign and also of the situation we face as human beings that we need to constantly tend to our hearts before God, removing those obstacles, so that we can live fruitful lives as God's people.

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