

Kingdom, Covenants & Canon of the Old Testament

Lesson 3

Divine Covenants

Lesson Guide



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

Understanding God's covenants is crucial to grasping the significance of every portion of the Old Testament.

II. Kingdom and Covenants(2:31)

The term usually translated "covenant" (*berith* in Hebrew) appears 287 times in the Old Testament.

God's covenants were inextricably linked to his rule as the divine king and to the expansion of his kingdom on earth.

A. Archaeological Discoveries (3:55)

Archeological discoveries help us grasp how faithful ancient Israelites saw fundamental connections between God's covenants and his kingdom.

Three types of royal documents from the ancient Near East:

- royal parity treaties – covenants in which kings of relatively equal status negotiated the terms of their relationships with each other
- royal grants – writings that reveal how ancient kings formally bestowed lands or special status to their faithful servants

- suzerain-vassal treaties – international agreements that great kings established with lesser, subservient kings and their nations:
 - offer significant insights into the relationship between God's kingdom and his covenants

 - usually contained seven main elements:
 - preamble
 - historical prologue
 - stipulations
 - readings and renewals
 - divine witnesses
 - blessings and curses
 - sacrificial meal

The typical elements of suzerain-vassal treaties revealed an underlying, threefold dynamic:

- *royal benevolence* – The kindness that great kings showed to their vassals.

- *vassal loyalty* – Vassals observed the king's laws and offered tributes to demonstrate grateful, loyal service.

- *consequences* – Kings proclaimed blessings for faithful vassals and warned of curses for unfaithful vassals.

B. Biblical Insights (12:58)

God decisively administered his kingdom through six major covenants.

We can illustrate how suzerain-vassal treaties give us insights into the nature of God's covenants by looking at God's covenant in Moses.

God's covenant in Moses was designed to serve God's kingdom purposes by making Israel "a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:4-6).

- God reminded the Israelites of the divine benevolence he'd shown when he delivered them from slavery in Egypt (v. 4).
- God called for human loyalty (v. 5).
- Moses' covenant entailed consequences for Israel (vs 5-6).

In one way or another, *all* biblical covenants reflect the promises of God and the obligations of his people.

III. History of Covenants (21:44)

All of God's covenants were designed to administer the expansion of God's kingdom, but they emphasized different policies at different stages of history.

A. Universal Covenants (22:36)

Adam and Noah's covenants were "universal" because God made them with all of humanity in the primeval history.

1. Adam (24:48)

The covenant with Adam appears in the creation narrative found in the Genesis 1–3.

Three pieces of evidence strongly suggest that God made his first covenant with Adam as the representative of humanity:

- The basic dynamics of divine covenants appear throughout Genesis 1–3.
- Hosea 6:7 compares the rebellion of Israel with Adam's sin and speaks of both as breaking God's covenant.

- Noah's covenant was presented as a confirmation of the previously existing covenant made with Adam.

The covenant with Adam addressed the most fundamental features of his interactions with humanity – “covenant of foundations.”

2. Noah (28:38)

The covenant with Noah was established in the primeval period and concerned basic issues that face humanity (Genesis 6:18).

After the flood, God renewed his covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:9-11).

The Noahic covenant ensured the stability of the created order – “covenant of stability.”

The universal covenants established basic kingdom policies that still apply to all people in all places and at all times.

B. National Covenants (31:58)

God made three “national” covenants that moved Old Testament Israel to the center stage of his kingdom purposes.

1. Abraham (32:37)

We find explicit references to Abraham’s covenant in Genesis chapters 15 and 17.

God’s covenant with Abraham set his descendants apart to spread God’s kingdom throughout the world – “covenant of election” or “covenant of promise.”

2. Moses (36:01)

Moses frequently appealed to the covenant with Abraham as the basis of his own kingdom work (Exodus 32:13).

The primary record of God entering into covenant with Israel in the days of Moses is in Exodus chapters 19 through 24.

One of Israel’s chief needs in the days of Moses was a system of laws to govern them (Exodus 19:7-8) – “covenant of law.”

3. David (38:51)

When Israel became a full-fledged kingdom, God made a covenant with David that was built on the covenant with Moses (2 Chronicles 6:16).

God advanced his kingdom by establishing David's house to rule over Israel in perpetuity (Psalm 89:3-4) – “covenant of kingship”

C. New Covenant (42:11)

The Old Testament predicted a new covenant that would come during the final stage of God's kingdom.

- Jeremiah 31:31
- Ezekiel 37:26
- 1 Corinthians 11:25

The new covenant governs God's people as Christ fulfills all that God accomplished in his earlier covenants (Jeremiah 31:31-34) – “covenant of fulfillment.”

IV. Dynamics of the Covenants (47:27)

Each Old Testament covenant had distinctive emphases, yet the dynamics of God's interactions with his people remained consistent.

- Adam's covenant – foundational patterns
- Noah's covenant – stability of nature
- Abraham's covenant – God's promise and election
- Moses' covenant – God's law
- David's covenant – the Davidic dynasty
- The new covenant – fulfillment

The dynamics of living in covenant with God always involved:

- the benevolence of God
- the requirement of human loyalty
- consequences for loyalty and disloyalty

God exercised his right as king to implement covenant dynamics in ways that fulfilled his purposes.

A. Universal Covenants (50:54)

God administered his universal covenants through the dynamics of divine benevolence, human loyalty, and consequences for obedience and disobedience.

1. Adam (52:05)

Divine Benevolence: God showed much benevolence toward the first man and woman, even before they sinned.

Human Loyalty: God tested Adam and Eve's loyalty with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16-17).

Consequences: God told Adam and Eve that they would suffer the consequences of his curse if they ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:17).

2. Noah (55:15)

Divine Benevolence: God showed kindnesses to Noah and his family that extended to his descendants (Genesis 6:8).

Human Loyalty: God commanded Noah to build the ark and gather the animals and to be loyal to him (Genesis 6:18-19; 9:7).

Consequences: Noah was faithful to God, so God was pleased and blessed him with a stable world, but warned him against rebellion (Genesis 8:20-21; 9:6).

B. National Covenants (58:46))

Just as in earlier covenants, each national covenant was shaped by divine benevolence, human loyalty and the consequences of blessings and curses.

1. Abraham (59:47)

Divine Benevolence: God demonstrated kindness to Abraham by forgiving him, counting him as righteous, and protecting him (Genesis 12:2).

Human Loyalty: God required Abraham to:

- leave his homeland and family and to go to a place he had never seen (Genesis 12:1).
- walk before him and be blameless (Genesis 17:1-2).

Consequences:

- The increase of Abraham's descendants would be a consequence of obedience (Genesis 17:1-2).
- If any male descendants were not circumcised, they would be cut off from his people (Genesis 17:10-14).

2. Moses (1:04:19)

We see all the dynamics of the covenants in God's covenant with Moses in the Ten Commandments.

Divine Benevolence: God's mercy and grace to Israel is evident in the prologue of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2).

Human Loyalty: The first commandment reveals God's requirement of loyalty from his people (Exodus 20:3).

Consequences: The Ten commandments also speak of the consequences of obedience and disobedience (Exodus 20:4-6).

3. David (1:07:42)

Divine Benevolence: God chose David and upheld him and his descendants as rightful kings of Israel (Psalm 89:3-4).

Human Loyalty: David and his sons were required to keep God's law (Psalm 89:30).

Consequences: If David's sons forsook God's laws, they would be punished severely (Psalm 89:32), but great blessings would come if they were faithful to God.

C. New Covenant (1:09:40)

The threefold dynamic of life in covenant with God is true of the new covenant as well (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

- *Divine Benevolence*: God promised to show great kindness to his exiled people as he established the new covenant.
- *Human Loyalty*: God does not promise to do away with his laws, and he does not exempt anyone from obeying them.
- *Consequences*: God will bring blessings to his people because he will enable them to keep his covenant.

The new covenant comes into effect in three stages, following the pattern of the final phase of God's kingdom in Christ.

- *Inauguration*: God sent his Son to keep God's law and to offer himself as sacrifice, bringing eternal forgiveness to believers (Hebrews 9:12-15).
- *Continuation*: Christ reigns and intercedes on our behalf; he deals with our failures and ensures our eternal blessings (Hebrews 7:24-25).
- *Consummation*: Every person who has trusted Christ will be perfectly loyal to God, and will receive the blessing of eternal life (Hebrews 9:28).

V. People of the Covenants (1:19:03)

God's covenants engaged different groups of people in various ways.

1. Within Covenants (1:20:52)

Both believers and unbelievers are included within God's covenants.

- The universal covenants in Adam and Noah bound all people to God — both believers and unbelievers.

- The national covenants in Abraham, Moses and David included all people of Israel, whether they had received eternal salvation or not.

- Old Testament prophecies indicate that, ultimately, the new covenant will only include true believers (Jeremiah 31:34); however:
 - The new covenant in Christ is fulfilled in three stages.

 - Until Christ returns, both believers and unbelievers are counted among God's people (1 John 2:19).

2. Included and Excluded (1:27:50)

All of humanity was included in the universal covenants, but Gentile nations were excluded from Israel's national covenants.

During the time of the national covenants with Israel, there were three kinds of people in the world:

- true believers who were in Israel's covenants
- unbelievers who were in Israel's covenants
- unbelieving Gentles who were excluded from Israel's covenants

Now that Christ has come, those outside of the new covenant include both Jews and Gentiles who have no part in Christ or his church.

B. Application of Dynamics (1:30:32)

1. Unbelievers Excluded (1:31:23)

Unbelievers not connected to the national covenants and the new covenant are nonetheless bound to God's universal covenants.

- *Divine Benevolence*: God shows kindness to all people. These blessings are called “common grace” (Matthew 5:45).
- *Human Loyalty*: Unbelievers outside the covenants still have a basic understanding of their obligations to God through “natural” or “general revelation” (Romans 1:20).
- *Consequences*: Unbelievers can experience temporary blessings and curses, but at the great judgment the curses will become eternal.

2. Unbelievers Included (1:35:08)

Unbelievers included in God's covenants experience all three dynamics of the covenant.

- *Divine Benevolence*: Although without eternal salvation, unbelievers who are joined to God's covenant people are shown great kindness (Romans 9:4).
- *Human Loyalty*: Because unbelievers in the covenants have greater knowledge of God's will, God holds them to higher standards of obedience (Luke 12:48).
- *Consequences*: Unbelievers in the covenants experience temporary blessings, but unless they come to faith, they remain under God's judgment forever (Hebrews 10:28-29).

3. Believers Included (1:39:17)

True believers included in God's covenants experience the dynamics of interaction with God differently.

- *Divine Benevolence*: There is immeasurable benevolence for true believers, including the forgiveness of sins and eternal fellowship with God (Romans 8:1-2).

- *Human Loyalty*: True believers serve and honor God out of gratitude and obey God's law to as a test of their faith (Romans 8:12, 13; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Philippians 2:12).

- *Consequences*: True believers experience temporary blessings and are trained through discipline. When Christ returns they will experience only eternal blessings (Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 21:7).

VI. Conclusion (1:45:00)

3. How did the universal covenants move God's kingdom purposes forward?

4. How did the national covenants move God's kingdom purposes forward?

5. How does the new covenant move God's kingdom purposes forward?

6. How are covenant dynamics expressed in the universal covenants?

7. How are covenant dynamics expressed in Israel's national covenants?

8. How are covenant dynamics expressed in the new covenant?

Application Questions

1. How is your personal relationship with God shaped by the three central features of covenants? In what ways do these three features highlight important aspects of your relationship to God?
2. In this study, we have seen that all covenants are dependent upon the grace and mercy of God. Why is it significant to recall this fundamental element of covenants as we explore the requirement of loyal obedience, and the consequences due to loyalty and disloyalty?
3. All biblical covenants contained consequences of blessing and cursing. What are some ways you can see this dynamic at work in the modern world? In your church? In your own life?
4. How should the understanding that there are three types of people in the world impact the way you view other members of the church? How should it impact your understanding of church membership? Does it have any impact on your understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper?
5. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?

Glossary

Abraham – Old Testament patriarch, son of Terah, father of the nation of Israel with whom God made a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 promising innumerable descendants and a special land

Adam – The first man; husband of Eve; man with whom God made the covenant of foundations in which humanity was to fill and subdue the earth

berith – Hebrew term (transliteration) most commonly translated “covenant”; also spelled “berit”

canon – Authoritative standard; the exclusive collection of documents in the Judeo-Christian tradition recognized as Scripture

common grace – God's benevolence shown to all people

consummation – Third and final stage of inaugurated eschatology when Christ will return and fulfill God's ultimate purpose for all of history

continuation – Second or middle stage of inaugurated eschatology; the period of the kingdom of God after Christ's first advent but before the final victory

covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

covenant of election – God's covenant with Abraham that assured the privileges and responsibilities of Israel as God's chosen people; sometimes called the covenant of promise.

covenant of foundations – God's covenant with Adam that emphasized the goals of God's kingdom and the role of human beings in his kingdom

covenant of fulfillment – God's covenant with his people in Christ that was designed to reverse the failures of the past and fulfill God's kingdom purposes; also called the “new covenant”

covenant of kingship – God's covenant with David that established Israel as a kingdom and emphasized that David's royal dynasty would endure and his descendant would sit on the throne and reign forever

covenant of law – God's covenant with Moses that set God's law before the tribes of Israel as a unified nation

covenant of promise – God's covenant with Abraham that emphasized promises for the increase of Israel and possession of the Promised Land, and designated Israel to spread God's blessings to the entire world; sometimes called the covenant of Israel's election

covenant of stability – God's covenant with Noah that assured nature's stability

David – Second Old Testament king of Israel who received the promise that his descendant would sit on the throne and reign forever

general revelation – God's use of the natural world and its workings to make his existence, nature, presence, actions and will known to all humanity

inauguration – First stage in inaugurated eschatology; refers to Christ's first coming and the ministries of his apostles and prophets

Moses – Old Testament prophet and deliverer who led the Israelites out of Egypt; man with whom God made a national “covenant of law” and who administered the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant to the Israelites; also appeared with Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration

national covenant – A covenant made with an individual who represented the nation of Israel (Abraham, Moses, and David)

natural revelation – Knowledge of God that comes through the ordinary workings of the natural world and providence

new covenant – The covenant of fulfillment in Christ; first mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31

Noah – Man who, under God’s direction, built an ark and survived the Flood; individual with whom God made a universal covenant that promised the enduring stability of nature

parity treaty – A type of treaty that was made between two equals

royal grant – Formal agreement in which ancient kings bestowed lands or special status on their faithful servants

suzerain – A powerful emperor or king that ruled over smaller nations; the more powerful party of a covenant; the one to whom it was necessary to submit

suzerain-vassal treaty – A covenant arrangement made between a conquering emperor and a lesser ruler

universal covenant – A covenant made with an individual who represented all of mankind (Adam and Noah)

vassal – A king or nation that must submit to a more powerful emperor or king (suzerain)