

# He Gave Us Prophets

LESSON  
FOUR

Dynamics of the  
Covenants  
Discussion Forum



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# He Gave Us Prophets

## Lesson Four: Dynamics of the Covenants

### Discussion Forum

With

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Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.  
Dr. Brian D. Russell  
Dr. Seth Tarrer  
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Dr. Larry Trotter  
Dr. Miles Van Pelt

### Question 1:

#### What is a covenant?

#### Rev. Michael J. Glodo

A covenant is a common political arrangement in the world of the Bible, typically between a greater king and a lesser king, and so sometimes they're referred to as *suzerain* — the greater king — and *vassal* treaties. The divine-human covenants you see in the Bible mirror that because God uses that political convention in order to reveal himself in his relationship with his people. So, the biblical covenants between God and man are a greater king — that is, God — making an arrangement, a commitment, a relationship with a lesser — that is, the people of Israel. There are various definitions offered among Old Testament scholars of what a covenant is. One very popular definition is O. Palmer Robertson's "a bond in blood, sovereignly administered." You see the elements of that. You see a bond; that is, a relationship that is more than just casual; it is a committed relationship. And so, in a covenant, God commits himself to his people, but in return they are to be committed to him as well. It's a bond in blood because sometimes you see, in the Bible, covenants are sealed with a blood ceremony, but what Robertson means, more than that, is a "bond in blood" meaning it's a life and death bond. That is, the relationship is one that can provide life, but the breaking of that relationship can result in death. And it's "sovereignly administered" in that it's not like a contract where two equal parties come together and negotiate a relationship. It's not a relationship with two equals, but it's sovereignly administered in that God is the greater. He offers these covenant relationships, and God's people enter into that relationship with him as their sovereign. Another definition that you might hear is a "love-life bond," because we have to remember that *love* is what motivates God to make covenant with his people. It's not *merely* legal. And so, in various traditions you see emphasis on the legal side; in others, you see emphasis on the relational or the love side. But it's a both-and type of relationship, and that relationship has consequences for good or for ill. And so, covenants commonly have curses that go along with the prospect of breaking the

covenant, but they also offer blessing for the parties keeping the covenant. And so, in the divine-human covenants of Scripture we see blessedness is the result of walking in the ways of God, keeping his commands, and as a result that relationship is a living relationship where God imparts his divine life to his people.

**Dr. Larry Trotter**

In the Bible, in both Old Testament and New Testaments, we find the words for what we call a “covenant.” Now, the Bible never gives a definition of a covenant, and so we need to try to look at similar arrangements that are called covenant and try to discern what those are. In the twentieth century, a number of theologians came up with different definitions. The broadest definition, perhaps, was Louis Berkhof’s definition. He simply called it a “pact” or “agreement between two parties,” which is a very broad definition... In the last century other theologians tried to be more specific, John Murray, for example... He said, “Well, let’s take our cue from the first use of the word, and it was used in the covenant with Noah.” ... And so he defined covenant as a sovereign administration of God’s grace and promise... Another definition, which is broader than that is O. Palmer Robertson’s. He noticed that in the covenants that there was almost always a shedding of blood, and so he called it “a bond in blood, sovereignly administered.” And that works well with most of the covenants. That would include the covenant with Adam because there was the shedding of blood when Adam and Eve were covered by the animal skins... Another interesting definition of covenant is Meredith Kline’s. Meredith Kline did work on Hittite treaties, and he noticed a parallel in the structure of Hittite treaties — the ancient Hittites of the Old Testament period — the Hittite treaties and the structure of the Mosaic law. And he began to see these parallels, and he drew some interesting implications from that, and he called it a ... “commitment that’s divinely sanctioned and administers the kingdom of God.” And that sounds a bit more complicated, but it’s actually quite broad... So it’s not a simple question when you ask, what is a covenant? You might have to ask, according to whom? Or which covenant are we looking at? But, I would say that it would be preferable to choose a broader definition of covenant so that we can see these various pacts or agreements between God and himself, between God and humanity in the state of innocence, and between God and Christ the Redeemer and his people after sin had entered into the world.

**Dr. Seth Tarrer**

In the Old Testament, a covenant is understood to be an alliance, an agreement, a treaty between either humans and other humans — two parties on earth — or, more theologically rich, between God and humans, particularly in the case of the Old Testament, his elect people of Israel. Covenants have occurred throughout Scripture. Agreements have been made between God and humans. First we see it with an explicit covenant being made with Noah. Next, God makes a covenant with Abraham that’s reiterated several times in the middle text of Genesis. God then makes a covenant with Moses at Sinai in the giving of the Law. God also institutes a covenant that perpetuates this agreement God has set with his people Israel. He does it with the king, David. And then finally, Jeremiah promises that this new covenant will be understood in a new way or new mode at some point in the future, which we see

inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ at the institution of the Lord's Supper. When we think about covenant, however, it's important to realize, covenant was not an end in itself. Covenant was a means to an end. The end was relationship with God. No other ancient Near Eastern religion thought of their god in these personal terms. They obeyed, enacted sacrifice, performed duties in order to receive the blessings of their god. However, in the Old Testament, God comes to his people, he elects them out of his sovereign goodness, and he performs the covenant duties in Genesis because Abraham can't. God knows this... Throughout Scripture we see God at pains to keep this relationship alive. Now, the covenant can be understood in some ways as a conduit, not an end in itself. The conduit enables God's people to experience God's *chesed*, his lovingkindness, his goodness. And in that they can enjoy God's *shalom*.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

A covenant is an agreement or treaty between two parties — a stronger one and a weaker one, a suzerain and a vassal, a greater and a lesser. In this agreement, the suzerain, or the master, sets stipulations for the covenant and imposes certain requirements. He commits to provide protection and offers some sort of blessings or aids to the weaker party, the vassal. On the other hand, the vassal, the weaker or the servant party, is required to offer his loyalty to the suzerain in the context of the covenant. There are also promises of more and greater blessings for faithfulness. At the same time, there are consequences for rebellion and disobedience where there will be punishment from the suzerain or the master. So, the covenant is an agreement between two parties in the form of a treaty that includes certain conditions and has consequences and sanctions in relation to the vassal's commitment to these conditions.

**Question 2:**

**How has the discovery of ancient Near Eastern treaties helped us understand biblical covenants?**

**Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

The faith of Israel, just like the Christian faith, is unique. It doesn't fit with any other religion in the world. But that's not to say that there aren't parallels between the Christian faith or Israel's faith that we can find in other ways of life, other religions, other cultures, even cultures that haven't been deeply influenced by the faith of Israel or by the Christian faith. And that's the way it is when it comes to the parallels that scholars often point out between biblical covenants and documents that we have discovered in recent history from the ancient Near East. There are parallels. That's not to say that Israel's covenants are *simply* like those things in the ancient world. They're not. They're different from those things, but there are some similarities, and these similarities do help us, in some respects, understand the workings of God's covenants in the Bible, because you always have to remember that the people living in the days of the Bible knew about these other things. They were common knowledge. And because it was common knowledge to them, they didn't need the

help that we often need, living so long after those times and so ignorant of those general cultural norms that everyone in that day understood. Well, in recent history there have been discoveries of texts from all over the ancient Near East, from the Hittites, and from Egypt, and from the Babylonians, and from the Assyrians, and all around, where you can find parallels that exist between documents that were given by ancient Near Eastern emperors and great kings and the ways that they regulated their kingdoms through these documents. Now, oddly enough, when God regulates his kingdom in the Bible, he regulates them by means of covenants, and these covenants have parallels, or have similarities, to the kinds of documents that we've found that ancient Near Eastern kings used. Again, that's not to say that God's just another ancient Near Eastern king or that Israel is just making this up because everybody believed it in these days. Rather, it's to say that God actually revealed himself this way to Israel, but in a unique and different way, still with some parallels and some similarities.

Now, one of the great controversies these days has to do with, what are those parallels? And what kind of documents from the ancient world actually give us those parallels? And sometimes people will say, "Well, there are these documents called "royal land grants" — or "royal grants," because there's a variety of them — where great kings or great leaders would grant land or offices or privileges to people. And we have these documents because, often, they're on the sides of these *kudurri*, these boundary markers that mark them off, and the words were there, and we've discovered them, and we can read them. And they do sound in many respects, many times, a lot like the kinds of things you find in Bible covenants. Another set of these documents from the ancient Near East is what we often call now "suzerain-vassal treaties," and these were treaties that were made between great kings and lesser kings establishing what their relationship was going to be and how things were going to be run in this big empire that the great king was establishing through these little kingdoms that he had conquered. And there are lots of parallels between those documents and biblical covenants also.

Again, that's not to say that the biblical covenants can be reduced to these things or that they are simply products of that ancient Near Eastern world, but rather that God revealed himself in ways that people could understand. And the way they understood things in their day was represented, in some respects, by these kinds of ancient Near Eastern documents. And so, it's just very helpful to be able to look at those documents so long as we don't fall into the trap of thinking that because there are *some* parallels, everything is parallel, or because there are *some* similarities, everything is similar, because the Bible tells us that God is our great *divine* king. He is not a human king, he's a divine king, and that he is wise and that he's holy, that he's not like any other king you can possibly imagine, not even like the other gods, so-called "gods," that he is greater than them all, and that he has his ways that he does things. And so, his covenants stand out for Israel and the new covenant for the Christian church. They stand out as distinct from all these other ancient Near Eastern documents that we can find and that we can study. As much as they can help us, they

can only help us a bit, because the only resource that gives us reliable, absolutely reliable understanding of what biblical covenants are is the Bible itself.

**Dr. Daniel L. Kim**

We see in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Genesis, two different types of treaties exhibited in Scripture. First, we see what we call a “parity treaty” between two people of equal ability, equal authority, in which they make an agreement that is mutually beneficial to both. So take for example Abraham and Abimelech, or even later on with his son Isaac. Abimelech reinstitutes a covenant with him because the covenant ends with the death of one of the two party members. And so, in cases like that, you have a treaty that is intended to benefit both, perhaps and most likely through the purpose of peace between the two parties so that neither party gets hurt, and that way they can both coexist or at least reasonably coexist with each other without any future issues. The second kind of treaty that we see is actually between what some people in the ancient Near Eastern called the “suzerainty-vassal treaty,” and that’s usually between unequal powers, one who is stronger and greater, who most likely has already overtaken you and conquered you and would now like to be in a relationship in which the greater person, the suzerain, receives all the benefits from the vassal. So, most often, it requires allegiance from the vassal to continue to pledge their allegiance to the suzerain. But most importantly, it actually also requires taxation. So, the suzerain, for the most part, will come yearly to the vassal and exact from it all the necessary animals, oil, all the wheat and barley that the suzerain will require for the coming year. And so, as a result, the vassal will typically tax his own people to make up for this relationship. But there is a benefit for the vassal and that is the suzerain will in turn come to its rescue whenever there is any conquering army or invading army that is in their presence, and so they had that kind of mutual protective relationship there as well.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

Ancient Near Eastern archaeological discoveries have helped us understand biblical covenants. The ancient Near Eastern treaties had a certain structure or form that was divided into five main parts. The first part is the introduction in which the suzerain, or the sovereign, identifies himself. He announces his name and he plainly expresses his desires in this covenant. He also literally identifies himself and clearly and explicitly declares that this treaty is his full intention, and he was not forced into it. The second part is a historical prologue in which the suzerain, or the greater leader, mentions a certain historical event where he showed his benevolence or good deed to the other party — the vassal — of the covenant. He starts by reminding the vassal, or the servant, of the benevolence he provided in history. The third part or item is that, based on the suzerain’s identity and the benevolent work that he showed over history, he now sets his stipulations or laws. The general or main condition is loyalty, exclusive allegiance — “I gave you benevolence” — and as a result, it’s expected that the vassal be fully faithful and loyal to the suzerain. Also, there are more specific and detailed written stipulations in addition to the main condition, which is loyalty and faithfulness. The fourth part, is the sanctions or consequences. If the vassal obeys the stipulations, and behaves according to them, there will be blessings and more



benevolences from the suzerain. But, if he disobeys or rebels, there will be sanctions. All of these were written in much more detail in the treaty. Finally, there's the administration of the treaty. After the treaty is made, and all these details are written down, they make two copies, one for the suzerain and the other for the vassal. Each of them puts the treaty in the sanctuary where he worships his god ... to be a reminder and to add a sacred attribute to this document or agreement. Such an important document was put in their holiest place to indicate the importance of the document and how serious this agreement was and what was included in it, and that there was no way to manipulate or disrespect it.

### **Question 3:**

#### **How do all biblical covenants display God's benevolence?**

##### **Dr. Greg Perry**

Every one of the covenants of Scripture begins with God's gracious initiative, that a great king is giving protection, giving land, giving benefits to a less powerful partner and is establishing this relationship — not the junior partner but the great partner, the great king — God is establishing this relationship, first with creation, then we see it with Noah and the renewal of that. We see it also with Abraham. And so, God is the beginning, the one who initiates this relationship, and he gives gifts and benefits in that covenant relationship to carry out what he wants his reign to do his business in the world. So, it's really interesting because the land really corresponds to the initial commission to Adam to subdue the garden, to subdue the earth. The promise of children in the covenants refer back to “multiply and subdue the earth.” And so, the covenants restore the original pattern of how man should show forth God's reign in the world and bear God's image.

##### **Dr. David Correa, translation**

All biblical covenants display God's benevolence in several ways. One simple way we can see this is that God, without having any obligation, decides to enter into a relationship with his people. So then, God, out of his own grace, out of his own mercy, chooses for himself a people without having to do so. Also, divine benevolence is displayed in how God gives many blessings for his people to enjoy. In the case of Adam and Eve, in the first covenant, divine benevolence was shown in how the Lord put at their disposal all that he had created. The Lord gave them permission to eat freely of all the trees except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Also, when he made restitution in the covenant with Noah, God once more displayed his benevolence by not only preserving the human race, but also guaranteeing them a stable world so that human beings would have the opportunity to be faithful to the Lord. And so, by the way, we can see this throughout the whole Bible... God shows his benevolence in many ways arriving, of course, at the new covenant when the Lord, by grace, grants that the Lord Jesus Christ will carry, on himself, the punishment that belongs to his people. And, in turn, the Lord, by grace, grants his people forgiveness of sins and bestows on them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Dr. Dan Lacich**

When we look at God's relationship with the people of Israel, one of the things that comes out clearly is that he blesses them in supernatural ways over and over again. And I think there's a real purpose behind that that helps them to be able to maintain their relationship with God and their loyalty to the covenant... And with God, it's never about us earning that kind of thing; it's really about his grace. And so, the supernatural blessings that he pours out upon them, I think, is the best way in the long run for people to continually be reminded, this is a God who loves us, who cares for us, who will never leave or forsake us, and because of that love that we've received from God, we turn around and continue to love him and stay loyal to that relationship.

**Question 4:**

**Are divine covenants unconditional, or do they include an element of human responsibility?**

**Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

It's very unfortunate, but a lot of Christians, when they hear the word "covenant," in their minds they automatically go, "Well, I know what a covenant is. It's a promise." And we all know that if a person makes a promise, there are no conditions attached to it. They're going to do it no matter what, especially if they "swear" they're going to do it — that kind of a promise. And it's true that God makes promises in his covenants and that he will keep those promises and that they will not fail, but it's a mistake to think that covenants are simply promises. Now, some Christian groups will say that some of the covenants in the Bible are promises, pure and simple, and some of them are conditional, and the way things are worked out depends on what people do. But in reality, if you take a look at the Bible very carefully, you can see that there are always elements of every covenant in the Bible — whether it's Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, or even the new covenant — there are elements or dimensions of each of those covenants that will be fulfilled no matter what. I mean, for example, when God says to Abraham that, "Your family is going to be the family that's going to become the instrument of my grace to the entire world," that's going to happen. It's absolutely going to happen. Now, *how* it's going to happen, that's another story, but we know that ultimately it's fulfilled in Jesus and the church, beginning with its Jewish roots, that this is the instrument, this is the fulfillment of that call of Israel to be, and that promise that God made that Israel would be that kind of instrument for the entire world. So, there are always dimensions of every covenant that God is ensuring will work out in one way or another. They are promises. But every single covenant also has conditions ... conditions that affect the way these promises work out in the lives of individuals and groups of people, because God is not going to fulfill his promises in particular ways with people who rebel against him, but rather he's going to, as it were, go around them, get them out of the picture. He's going to find a faithful people. He's going to fulfill his promises that way. And the reality is that the Bible story is just that. It's a story of how God does make promises

in his covenants, but that those promises have associated with them conditions of loyalty to God, and that there are consequences to all of these covenants. Now, in the Bible, the Bible sometimes will emphasize one side of this or the other. Sometimes a particular passage will emphasize the great promises that God makes in his covenants, and other passages will emphasize the conditions that are associated with those promises. But no matter what a particular passage emphasizes, it's always important for us to remember that God's covenants, yes, they are sure, and that God will fulfill what he has promised in one way or another, but at the same time there are conditions that dictate, by God's own free choice, how he's going to do that as people react to the requirement of loyalty that's upon because they are the covenant people of God.

**Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus**

The question of conditionality in divine covenants, or the question of unconditionality in divine covenants, has been under a lot of discussion for some time. I think the most natural and best view is this: all of the covenants, every one of them is unconditional in this sense, each of those divine human covenants will continue. God will continue each one until it has accomplished the purpose for which he instituted it. On the other hand, every covenant is also conditional... They're conditional in the sense that under each covenant the Lord gives conditions. Under the Adamic covenant, there is the condition of not eating the fruit of the tree... Under the Noahic covenant, there is the condition that has to do with murder, and there seem to have been other issues as well because in Isaiah 24:5 — which is an eschatological poem sometimes called the “Isaiah Apocalypse” — and the Lord through Isaiah speaks of how the people have broken the laws and the statutes of “the everlasting covenant.” Well, that term, *berith olam*, “everlasting covenant,” is first used in Genesis 9:16 of the Noahic covenant. And so, scholars generally recognize that those two passages are related. What that tells us is that there were other conditions under the Noahic covenant that didn't get recorded, but we know they existed. Under the Abrahamic covenant, also, there were conditions. There is circumcision, but there is also, when God reaffirms the covenant with Isaac, he says he's doing so because Abraham obeyed my laws, my decrees, my requirements. Well, what were those? We don't know what they were. We aren't told. But by the time we reach that point in Genesis, we find that there were other conditions. Of course, the Mosaic covenant has many things that people have to obey; those are conditions. And even under the new covenant, even though our salvation doesn't depend on our perfect obedience, we still are called to the obedience of faith. There are things that we are supposed to do too. So, I think that's the better way to understand those terms and understand how they relate to the covenants.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

The question might be asked, are all divine-human covenants conditional and, therefore, do they all have an element of human responsibility? I think I would answer that question, yes, they're all conditional. But that doesn't mean they're a relationship of equals or that they're even a relationship based on merit, in no way. Probably one of the best places to think about this is in the renewal of the covenant with Isaac. God said to Isaac that because your father Abraham walked in my ways,

observed my statutes, my law and my commandments, therefore, I blessed him so that I might fulfill the promises to him. You see, Abraham's obedience to God's requirements, the stipulations of the covenant, were the means, the God-ordained means by which he would bless the nations. And now, if you look at Abraham's relationship with God, it was one that was sovereignly initiated. It was sealed where God ... took the curses of the covenant toward himself in the splitting of the animals in Genesis 15, but none of that removed the conditions upon Abraham. And so, obedience to God's commands — which we could easily call that faithfulness to God's commands, faithfulness to trust the Lord — is the mechanism by which he administers the blessings of the covenant. But that is not to say that obedience merits God's response. It's only because God has agreed, covenanted to bless, that he graciously blesses for the obedience rendered.

### **Question 5:**

#### **In what ways did biblical covenants require loyalty?**

##### **Dr. Greg Perry**

Each one of the biblical covenants that is rooted in the treaties of the ancient Near East reflect that this is a relationship, that a great king has brought another kingdom into relationship with himself. And so, every covenant has this expectation of loyalty on the part of the covenant partners. Sometimes biblical scholars have suggested that some covenants are promissory and others are obligatory, that the land that's given to Abraham is a promissory covenant, and the law that's given at Sinai is an obligatory covenant. But actually, what we see in the Bible and in the ancient Near East is that every covenant has both sides to it. Promises are being made but also it comes with an expectation of caring for and maintaining the relationship. So, we see that, even in the land grant treaty where God gives Abraham land, right after that, in chapter 17 and chapter 18 there's this expectation that, "You will walk before me, and you will teach your children my ways. You will walk in righteousness and in justice." So, God gives great gifts in his covenant, but also there is this expectation of love, of loyalty, of devotion to the great king.

##### **Dr. David Correa, translation**

The divine covenants, in many ways, required loyalty on the part of the vassals, in this case, the people of God. We can see that in the beginning, God, of course, told Adam that he could eat from every tree in the garden, but he put a restriction saying, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." ... And so, just as he required Adam's loyalty, we can see throughout the history of the biblical covenants that the Lord requires obedience, that he demands loyalty. Many mistakenly think that the covenant doesn't impose any obligation on the vassal. That's a mistake, a common error committed when interpreting biblical covenants. We can see in the law of Moses, in the prophetic books, and up to the new covenant, how God calls for obedience. The only reason we can be considered people who are loyal to the covenant is because Jesus

Christ kept the terms of the covenant for us. He was obedient, perfectly and completely, to the terms of the covenant. He was completely loyal. And, by grace, his obedience is given to us. But even though it's not by works but by grace that we have received the righteousness of Christ, it doesn't mean we have no responsibility at all. The New Testament, time and again, makes it perfectly clear that they who are in covenant with God, and who profess faith in Christ, should demonstrate their loyalty by their obedience.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

Through the covenant, God shows his steadfast love to us and gives us blessings and good things, but he requires, or asks, man to respond to these blessings by obeying his commands. Such obedience is through a genuine love for God. So, when the commandment says to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, it means that you must love God with all of your being, a perfect love with a perfect loyalty and dedication to the Lord in the context of the covenant. Actually, there is a close relationship between loving the Lord and obeying the Lord. That's why Jesus, in John 14:23, said these words:

**If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23).**

Here, Jesus connects love in a direct way with obeying his commands. But Jesus didn't stop there. Because of the great importance of this issue, he also mentioned it in a negative form. Just like mentioning it in a positive form, he mentioned it in a negative form. In verse 24, he said:

**Whoever does not love me does not keep my words (John 14:24).**

Therefore, love here is a voluntary act that stems from a conviction of faith from a person who is committed towards the Lord within the covenant. Man loves the Lord because he obeys the Lord, because the Lord has already shown steadfast love to him and taken the initiative in the covenant by giving him many blessings and good things. In Exodus 20, we read the Ten Commandments, and especially in the second commandment, God says these words:

**You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20:4-6).**

Our Lord here connects keeping the commandments with love when he mentions “those who love me and keep my commandments,” I will show them “steadfast love.” Therefore, the commandment to love God with all our hearts, minds and souls is closely and directly related to the covenant God made with us.

**Pastor Ornan Cruz, translation**

When we’re given the commandment to love God with all our mind, soul and heart, it affects all areas of our lives. In other words, it could have been translated, “Love God with all your being.” The Lord who has made a covenant with us has given us a commitment to be faithful, and we, as the other part of the covenant, we have a duty to be faithful to the God who has covenanted with us. In other words, loving God with our minds, with our hearts and with our souls is the response of our faithfulness to God, the response of our loyalty to God. We are telling him, “Lord, we are putting all of our being before you.”

**Question 6:**

**How do the Ten Commandments demonstrate that God’s relationship with his people is based on his grace and mercy?**

**Dr. David T. Lamb**

It’s tempting, as we look at the Ten Commandments, to see, oh, *more laws*. You know, God in the Old Testament gives his people a lot of laws. But as we look deeper, as we look closer at a lot of these laws, particularly even the Ten Commandments, we encounter God’s grace. Look at how the Ten Commandments begin. It says, “I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” So, we see God, first of all, being a God of deliverance, showing grace and mercy to his people. But even as we look through these commands, we can see grace. Well, basically, I mean, as Jesus essentially encapsulates the Ten Commandments — love God; love your neighbor — we see that these are commands that help us connect, reconcile, be in relationship with God and with humans. I see grace in that.

**Dr. Brian D. Russell**

The Ten Commandments are a powerful witness to God’s grace. A lot of times when we think about the Old Testament and the laws, we think about them just being about obedience, about earning God’s favor, but when we look carefully at the Ten Commandments, we can actually see that, in a sense, they’re showing us God’s grace by God graciously showing us how to respond to his grace. And that’s really the key piece. The Ten Commandments start with this statement by God . . . that before God gives any laws to his people, God reminds them of his grace: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” And what that does is sets up the rest of the Ten Commandments, not as laws to *become* God’s people, but gives God’s people an ethos, or a way of life, that allows them to respond to

God's grace. In fact, in the synagogue, Jewish persons actually take that statement as the first commandment — "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt" — as a way of reminding themselves about grace. But then, as you move through the rest of the Ten Commandments, how do we respond to God's grace? How do we live as people that have been delivered? Well, the Ten Commandments basically have two sections that are connected by the Sabbath commandment. In the first commands we have essentially, how do you love God? And you love God by having no other gods before the Lord, by not making graven images or images of God, and by not taking the Lord's name in vain. So, we love God by ... not practicing idolatry, essentially. So, that's the one piece. We have this vertical relationship with God, and we see God wants us to respond to his grace by being fully in allegiance to him. Then the second half of the Ten Commandments, starting with "Honor your father and mother," is we have a series of laws that give us standards for interacting with other people, because with the God of the Scriptures, it's not just a personal spirituality; there's a communal piece to this. It's not enough to simply love God. That's the critical piece, but then that has to then be expressed in the way that we live and love other people, and that's the second part of the Ten Commandments. Then right in the middle, we see this other piece of God's grace. It reminds us to keep the Sabbath: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," or "by keeping it holy." And right there we see in a microcosm the ethic that God wants. God has created us, ultimately, not for work but for rest, to abide in God's presence, and on Sabbath God combines, really, that vertical relationship of loving him with how we treat other people by carving into the fabric of creation this one day in which we do nothing; we remember God's grace... Everything closes down that day as we remember and practice the love for God and the love for our neighbors. And so, we see God's grace in action throughout those commands.

**Dr. Brandon D. Crowe**

Maybe some people think of the law of God as constrictive and antithetical to grace, but when we look at the way that God gave the law in the Old Testament, we can see that it was a gracious thing for God to give the law in the way that he did. What we see is that God gave the law to his people *after* he redeemed them from bondage of slavery in Egypt. As he led them out and powerfully intervened on their behalf, he then brings them into the wilderness and condescends to them and reveals his plan for how they are to live under the lordship and the kingship of God who is their great king. And so, the law is not something that God required his people to keep in order that he then might redeem them. Instead, the law was given after God redeemed them from Egypt and shows his people the way that they are to live under the lordship of God as great king, and how they are to live among one another as a redeemed people. And so, whenever you read about the law in the Old Testament, it's already being given in the context of God's gracious condescension to his people.

### Question 7:

#### What is the relationship between faith and works in the Christian life?

##### Rev. Larry Cockrell

The relationship between faith and works is that they are companions. I would consider them to be twins. There is a saying that goes, “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.” And so, the idea of partnership, of companionship exists in that. Primarily, when Paul deals with faith in Ephesians 2:8, he recognized that one can only come to salvation through faith in Christ. But then James goes on and he, I won’t say “takes it to another level,” but he provides for us the reality that if one is saved, then that salvation should be authenticated by works, meaning by the character, the lifestyle of that person, also by the kind of service that that person renders to his neighbor. If they are saved, then again, they will authenticate salvation by the kind of works that they do. He goes on to say, “Show me your faith without your works, and I’ll show you my faith by my works.” And so, again, they are twins. They do go together. If one is saved, then they will, by the grace of God, produce good works, authenticating that salvation has come to that heart.

##### Rev. Clete Hux

The relationship between faith and works is that they’re not opposed to one another as so many people think that they are. And it almost seems, however, that it’s paradoxical for the Scripture to teach that we’re saved by grace, free gift, rather than works, and then on the other hand, say that faith without works is dead. But the two really go together. As a matter fact, if we go back to Ephesians 2:8, 9, we need to look at verse 10. It says, “For we are ... created in Christ Jesus to [perform] good works.” So, we’re not saved by works. We’re saved by grace through faith that produces works and conforms us more and more to the image of Christ.

### Question 8:

#### What is saving faith?

##### Dr. Jeff Lowman

Certainly, one of the main themes in the Gospel of John is saving faith. To “believe” is an emphasis throughout the gospel. And its emphasis is placing in two areas. One is that belief, or becoming a child of God, is a work of God himself, and the other is that it is an action, as it were, taken on the part of the individual. And so, John in his gospel very clearly places a theological term, a synergistic aspect, upon faith. Now, faith is understood, saving faith is understood, certainly, as a gift. It’s God’s grace in our life that we believe. But it is based upon something that we are doing, and so there has to be an aspect of knowledge. There must be an understanding that Christ has died on the cross for our sins. There must also be a sense of assent, that we agree with that. But it goes far more than just knowing and agreeing. There is the sense of trust, and that is the crucial aspect of faith. It’s the empty hand of the individual reaching out and receiving all that God has done through his Son, Christ.



**Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

You know, one of the most frustrating things about the world around us is that the word “faith” is used so casually and so carelessly. There are a lot of people who basically talk about faith as if they have faith *in faith*. That’s not the way Christians talk about faith. There are all kinds of different faith. I’m sitting in a chair right now. I’ve got pretty good confidence that it’s going to hold me up. I’ve got faith in this chair. However, I wouldn’t have any faith in this chair to do anything other than to hold me up. It serves no other purpose. When we talk about the faith that saves, it’s a faith *in Christ*. It is trusting and resting in that trust that Christ has done all that is needful for our salvation. The faith that saves is a faith that is faith in Christ, knowing that it’s Christ who paid the penalty for our sin, knowing that it is Christ who purchased our salvation, knowing that it is *Christ* who has made full atonement for our sins, knowing that in him we have full forgiveness of our sins. The faith that saves is simply the confidence to rest and trust in Christ, knowing that he has done this on our behalf, that there is no more that is left to be done, and that he keeps those who come to him by faith forever. You know, saving faith, the faith that saves, is a faith that is defined by the fact that in its solitary, most essential meaning, we trust Christ. We would have nothing else. We desire nothing else. We know that Christ is sufficient for our salvation.

**Question 9:**

**What does Leviticus 26 teach us about God’s patience in bringing divine judgment?**

**Dr. Douglas Gropp**

It’s interesting to make a comparison of the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Curses in Deuteronomy 28 are fairly straightforward, but in Leviticus 26 they’re staged, giving the opportunity at each stage for Israel to repent. The recitation of the curses are designed in Leviticus to provide an opportunity to repent, and at the end of those lists of curses, there’s a section, I think it’s verses 40-41, actually making provision for the Israelites to confess their sins with the hopes that the Lord will honor the covenant that he made with the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and bring about a restoration... In the Prophets, and their use of covenant curses in judgment, sometimes they proclaim those curses using a transition word in Hebrew that’s translated “therefore” — *lahen* in Hebrew — where it’s giving God’s verdict on their sins and proclaiming the judgments that is to come. But sometimes the prophets use another term that’s often also translated “therefore,” but I think should be translated “that is why” — *alken* in Hebrew — and it’s really giving an explanation for why the covenant curses are already beginning to be realized. And in that sense, we see in the Prophets, the unfolding of the curses together with an implicit call for Israel to repent so as to bring an end to the full realization of the curses, mirroring the staging of the curses that we have in Leviticus 26.

**Dr. David Correa, translation**

Leviticus 26 teaches us, in many ways about God's patience, the great patience of our Lord. However, we can mention one that is very interesting. This was when Moses revealed the judgments that would come for unfaithfulness to the covenant. Moses tells us that the Lord didn't bring complete and total destruction all at once. Rather, he tells us there in Leviticus 26 that if the people were unfaithful, if they were disobedient, God would bring certain calamity to them. And if there was no repentance, he would gradually strengthen the punishment, continuing in this way until they came to the greatest threat, and that was exile. So, we see that God was patient because he gradually intensified the punishment, the curses, that would come upon the disobedient. That teaches us truthfully, as the psalmist tells us, that our Lord is a God slow to anger and abounding with mercy.

**Question 10:**

**If some of God's blessings are contingent on our obedience, does this mean that our good works contribute to our salvation?**

**Dr. Daniel L. Kim**

There's a unique relationship between good works and receiving God's blessings. Certainly, God promises blessings in return for good works. Does that necessarily mean that the good works will somehow help us gain our salvation? And the answer is clearly "no." Scripture has made it clear in both the Old and the New Testament that our relationship with God and our salvation is based on faith. Just like Abraham believed, so we are commanded as his sons and daughters to believe in God as well. So, the question is not, does it help us in our salvation? But the question is, does it help us in our relationship while we are here on earth and also in heaven? And I think that would be a more helpful question to ask regarding our good works. So, for example, let's say that somebody is a part of God's covenant community and God has a desire to use that person in a more leadership role. Well, certainly, it would have to come through demonstration of their faithfulness, not only before God, but also before God's covenant community, and how else can the Lord bless this person if the person does not respond with a proper obedience to God's commands and his laws. So, I would say that, in many ways, the question to be asked is, how can I better serve the Lord? In what way can I become more useful to him? And that's one of the ways we can do so, by being obedient and faithful to God's laws and his commandments in which we demonstrate that we are abiding in him in all that we do.

**Dr. Dan Doriani**

Good works are necessary for our salvation, but we have to distinguish the sense in which that's true. They're not what we call an *antecedent* necessity, that is to say, something we have to do in order to become saved, but they're a *consequent* necessity. That is to say, they're a necessary consequence of our salvation. Anyone who's truly a believer will produce, and must produce good works as a sign that Christ is alive; his Spirit is alive, in us. We could distinguish it this way: My children

do not obey me in order to become my children, in order to get a father. They obey me because I'm their father, because they love me and I love them. That's how we do good works for God our Father in heaven.

**Dr. K. Erik Thoennes**

Our good works don't contribute to our salvation, but they do contribute to the quality of our relationship with God here. And so, we're his people by his sovereign grace, but certain blessings of God are ours through obedience, through faith. God says that "My lovingkindness is toward those who fear me," and so, fearing the Lord and obeying the Lord and worshipping the Lord, does bring blessings in this life. And so, my relationship with my daughters is established. They're mine, that's for sure, that's never going to change. But my fellowship with them, depending on their obedience or level of respect, does change over time because I love them and I care for them and I want them to know that how they live before me matters and it makes a difference, not in our relationship, that's for sure, but certainly in our fellowship.

**Dr. Miles Van Pelt**

When we consider the role of good works in the life of the believer, we really have to think on two different levels. There is, on the one hand, the big picture, the big, redemptive, historical picture where God is working on our behalf to do what we could not do for ourselves, where we rest and trust in Christ's work on our behalf. That's the first step in recognizing the role of works in the life of the believer. But in light of that, once we rest in the work of Christ on our behalf, there is, therefore, at the actual daily level of living, the fruit of that resting which is good works in the life of the believer. And the good works in the life of the believer does produce blessing and does produce good things, good marriages, good families, good education, good community involvement... So, on the one hand, at the big level, we rest in someone else's work, the work of Christ on our behalf, but that produces fruit in our lives, and that fruit produces good works, which is the result of a greater good work. So, you have to get that priority right. It's not the lower level that affects the upper level. It's the upper level that makes the lower level possible.

**Question 11:**

**How did God promise to bless Israel and Judah after the judgment of exile?**

**Dr. Russell T. Fuller**

There were many blessings that God offered Israel and Judah after their exile. When you go back even to 1 Kings 8 where Solomon is dedicating the temple, he talks about the time when God might exile them because of their disobedience, but he says wherever they are, no matter what situation they're in, they just need to look toward Jerusalem, they need to look toward the temple and pray to the Lord, and if they'll turn back to him, God will answer their prayer. He'll forgive them of their sins and he'll restore them to their land. Of course, one of the great covenantal promises of the

Old Testament was the giving of the land of Israel to the Israelites, but one of the great judgments of the Old Testament was to take them out of their land. But the promise for exile is, though, “I’ll bring you back.” And what the exile does to the children of Israel is, they were given over to idolatry, and what the exile was going to do is burn idolatry out of their soul. And so, to bring them back in the land, and also, there were other promises given. For instance, they built a temple, a second temple. And when the people first saw that they were very disappointed because some of them remembered the first temple and the glory of that. But Haggai the prophet says, wait a minute, this second temple is going to have greater glory than the first temple, and the reason for that is that Messiah himself would come to that temple, and therefore, that temple was going to have a much greater glory than the one before. And so, even though they were going to be restored . . . from exile and so forth, they knew that their restoration was not the full promises of God, because Nehemiah, in chapter 9, talks about, we’re still slaves, meaning that they were slaves, really, to the people of Persia at that time. They did not have total freedom yet, but the ultimate promise of restoration from exile was the coming of Messiah and that he would take away our sins. That was the ultimate promise of blessing of return from exile that the children of Israel were looking for.

**Dr. Sean McDonough**

The Old Testament narrative as a whole is dominated by the theme of exile. It goes back to the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, and that’s just recapitulated in Israel’s own history. And so, this sort of depressing turn of events, which looms so large in the Old Testament narrative, naturally calls forth a desire for some hope beyond exile. So, we have plenty of near-term prophecies, particularly in Isaiah, that God will restore his people, but when you tie that back into the creation narrative, you realize that mere restoration to land is never going to be enough to undo the primal damage done in the beginning, or shortly after the beginning. . . . And so, it’s quite natural to find in the Old Testament prophets a yearning for near-term deliverance for Israel perhaps at the hand of a particularly gifted king, but also ultimate deliverance from some ultimate kingly representative of God’s people.

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