

## The Covenant with the Lord

### 1. Intro

- I'm sure most of you have the experience of putting your signature to an important document
- It may have been
  - Exchanging contracts on your house or flat
  - Signing your marriage certificate
  - Signing off on a business contract
  - It may even have been your last will and testament
- I don't know how you felt when you did sign off on that document ...
  - But my guess is you probably would have felt a fair degree of nervousness and apprehension because of the commitment you were about to make
- That's because your signature represents you ... and it's use has implications
  - When we put our signature on a contract ... we are inevitably committing to something significant
- If this is true for us personally, how much more true is this for the signatures that involves a nation
  - Whether that be a
    - Peace treaty
    - Trade agreement
    - Promise to build a wall along the Mexican border ;)
- A signature is the symbol that seals and ratifies a contract or agreement
- **Context**
- This is what is happening here in Exodus 24 > we're at a signing ceremony
- Israel is still at Mt Sinai after escaping from Egypt through the Red Sea
- At Mt Sinai God formalises his relationship with Israel in the form of a covenant [a solemn agreement]
- Exodus 19-24 ... the focus is on this covenant that God is establishing with Israel
  - Ch 20 – God gives them the 10 Commandments
  - Ch 21-23 – He gives Covenant Code or the Laws > these were an application of the 10 Commandments to OT Israel
  - Ch 24 – is the signing of the covenant between God and his people

## 2. The Intention of the Covenant

- What was the intention of the covenant?
- You see it there in v4-8
- Moses has been up the mountain receiving the 10 Commandments and the Law
- He comes back down the mountain in v3 and tells the Israelites all that God had told him
- He says
  - "God has graciously called us to be his people"
  - "We don't deserve it, we're not special, powerful or better than any other nation"
  - "Yet he has chosen us, he's rescued us out of slavery in Egypt"
  - "He has made us his people"
  - "And he has given us these commandments and laws for us to live by in response to this grace and mercy"
- And the people respond *with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do."*
  - And the Moses then wrote everything down > so there can be no disagreement
- Then ... in v4b-8 this covenant / this agreement between God and the people of Israel is ratified
- The next day Moses gets up and builds an altar - which represents God
  - And he set up 12 pillars of stone facing the altar ... representing the 12 tribes of Israel
- Then he slaughters animals and offers them as sacrifices, gathering the blood into bowls
  - Half the blood is splattered on the altar
- Then Moses reads out them the Book of the Covenant
  - That is ... all the laws of Ex 21-23 that God gave Moses and which he told them about in v3 then wrote down in v4
  - And now he formally reads them out to them all again and the people very emphatically say
    - *"We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."*
- Then ... *Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

- Now what's going on here?
- A couple of things
- First ... the blood that's sprinkled on the altar and on the people shows
  - that this covenant involved obligations of both parties
  - and that they were bound to each other in this covenant
    - Half the blood on the altar, half the blood on the people ... all from the one sacrifice ... therefore it has the effect of binding them together
  - Like today ... if you and I were buying a house and we were exchanging contracts for the sale ...
    - We would sit down with the other party
    - Two contracts > one each
    - We'd sign both of them
- And so the blood ritual is God and the people committing themselves to this covenant
  - God is promising to be their God and fulfill his promises to them
  - The people are promising to obey the terms of the covenant > the 10 commandments and the Law
  
- But there's a second thing happening here in this blood ritual
- And the clue is there in v5
- The sacrifices that were made were a burnt offering and a fellowship offering
  - In the OT, burnt offerings had a dual purpose
    - To make atonement between the person and the Lord; and
    - As an offering of whole-hearted devotion to the Lord
  - A fellowship offerings was a peace offering
    - It was offered in recognition that there was peace or fellowship between the one offering the sacrifice and the Lord
  
- In other words ...
  - Because God is holy and his people are not ... atonement for sin needs to be made if Israel is going to be able to enter into this covenant with God
  - Sin, idolatry, failing to love the Lord and love their neighbour cannot be swept under the carpet
  - It must be atoned for in order for there to be fellowship between them
  
- And so no matter how sincere the intent of the people to obey the Law ... they need the gracious initiative of the LORD if they're to be his people
- And so
  - the first sacrifice atones for their sin and

- the second is an offering of thanks in recognition
  - that through the atoning sacrifice,
  - there's now peace between God and his people
  - and they can now enter into this covenant agreement
  
- And so now the covenant is signed, sealed and delivered
  - Both parties have committed to it
  - Atonement has been made
  - They have fellowship with one another
  - And now the Israelites are set apart for obedience and service of the LORD
  
- Then ... once the covenant had been established, Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons and 70 elders representing the people go part way up the mountain to see God
  
- Now there's a tension here ... because we're told the leaders see the God of Israel
  - However just a few chapters later in Ex 33 Moses asks to see God's glory
  - And God replies v20 *"you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."*
  - Because the assumption is ... if we were to see God in all his majesty and splendour and power and glory we would freak out and die!
  
- But look at v11
  - *But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites*
- Now this indicates that they did not see God face to face as Moses requested
  - Because what they saw was not the eye to eye / face to face encounter with God which would have consumed them<sup>1</sup>
  - As verse 10 tells us ... they merely saw the pavement beneath his feet
  - This is not literal ... it's metaphorical
  - They got as close as anybody ever had or ever could
  - But all they saw was a glimpse of his glory ... not the living God face to face

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<sup>1</sup> See also **John 1:18** <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

- But there was something more ... for while they were on the mountain ... they ate and drank in the presence of God
- Clearly this is a fellowship meal to celebrate the covenant
  - You could say it's a meal to celebrate the deal
  - A little like the heads of state might have a banquet dinner at the end of an important conference
- And it symbolises the privileges of the covenant
  - Of access to God and fellowship with him
- So the intentions of the covenant were to
  - Formally bind God and Israel together in relationship with one another
  - Express their commitment to one another and their obligations to the other ... particularly Israel's obligation of obedience to the Law
  - Provide access to and fellowship with God
  - All made possible by the blood of the sacrifice

### **3. The Failure of the Covenant**

- While the covenant agreement brought great blessing to the people ... we can already see there are limitations with it
- You see even though the covenant provides for a unique relationship between the LORD and his people ... access to God was still limited
- We see that there in v12-18
- While the elders were able to go up onto the mountain and have access to God ... it was limited
  - They were restricted from getting too close to God
- For as we read on ... only Moses was able to go on into the cloud of God's glory that had descended on Mt Sinai
- Meanwhile the people remained at the bottom ... looking up
  - And only Moses as their mediator was able to go fully into Gods presence and see God's glory
- **Apologetic - Searching for access to God**
- This raises an interesting point about the access we have to God
- A lot of people say ...
  - If only I could see God ... then I would believe
- And others are turned off Christianity ... because it feels like God is so distant

- They feel like the Israelites down the mountain looking up and totally distant from God or any experience of him
- As a result ... they feel Christianity has no sense of reality
- God just seems far off and intangible ... and therefore not real
  
- But many of us are crying out for this experience of the divine
  - Ecclesiastes says '*God has set eternity in the hearts of men*'<sup>2</sup>
- Intuitively ... many believe there is a God
  - We know there's more this life and this world than to eat, drink and die
  - And so we're often searching for this reality ... this experience of God ... this access to ... this intimacy with God
  
- And so some will say ...
  - "Just let me see God ... then I'll believe"
  - "Give me a glimpse of God ... then I will know he is real ... and he is more than just an ideology or distant deity"
  
- And when then we don't get that ... we give up .. because we feel like the Israelites ... down the mountain ... unable to get what we're really seeking after
  
- So there's a problem with the covenant from the start ...
  - Access to God is limited only to Moses ... the mediator between God and the people
  
- However, an even more significant problem was about to happen ... just 40 days after the covenant had been ratified
  - Very soon the honeymoon between God and his people would all be over
  - Because within 40 days while Moses was up on the mountain ... the people will build for themselves an idol made out of gold in the shape of a calf and they would be bowing down and worshipping it
  
- You see, although God was committed to his people and the covenant
  - And even though the Israelites had every intention of keeping covenant with the Lord
  - They were promising more than they were able to perform
  - They were unable to live in full obedience to the Lord

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<sup>2</sup> Eccles 3:11

- At the very first opportunity ... their hearts would be led astray to love and worship things other than the Lord their God who had loved them and rescued them
- And all though the history of God's people ... their inability to obey the laws of the covenant would happen time, and time and time again, as they
  - Worshipped idols
  - Exploited the poor and widows
  - Failed to take care of the foreigner
  - Committed sexual immorality
  - Even great King David ... a man after God's own heart was guilty of adultery, murder and deceit
- **Application**
- And the experience of Israel highlights that it's utterly impossible for humanity to keep its side of the bargain when it comes to remaining in fellowship with God
- Any pretence we may have
  - That we're right with God on our own terms
  - That we're not a sinner
  - About our ability to live lives that will satisfy God ... are completely without foundation
- On our own, we cannot keep covenant with God
- And so ... on the face of it ... it seems as though the covenant is a failure
  - the people were unable to have full access to God
  - And they were unable to do what they pledged ... and obey the laws of the covenant

#### 4. The Renewal of the Covenant

- Despite Israel's sinfulness and inability to keep the covenant ... God continued to show grace to his people and remain faithful to the covenant
  - **Jeremiah 31:31-34** <sup>31</sup> *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. **"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they***

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*will be my people ... "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

- God's intention was to make a new covenant, a better covenant
  - A covenant where his laws would be written on our hearts not on tablets of stone
  - For the old covenant was just a shadow of the new covenant to come
- The new covenant would not be mediated not by a man like Moses, but by Jesus himself
  - Jesus confirms this to his disciples when he shares his final meal with them the night before he was crucified
    - *For on the night Jesus was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the **new covenant** in **my** blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*
- Like the old covenant, the new covenant would be a covenant with sacrifice at its heart
  - But it would not be the blood of animals that would ratify this new covenant ... it would be the blood of Christ himself
  - And the blood wouldn't be shed on the altar, it would be shed on the cross
- So how is new covenant a better covenant?
- What is it about this covenant, which means this new one won't fail as well
- Two things ...
  - The work of the Spirit
  - The work of Christ
- **Work of the Spirit**
- A critical difference in the effectiveness of the new covenant is the gift of the HS
  - When God promised in Jeremiah to write the law on our hearts ... the obvious question is ... how?
- God gives that answer in Ezekiel 36:26-27
  - <sup>26</sup> *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*
- Jesus promised he would send the Holy Spirit to dwell in us

- And as does
  - he convicts people of the truth of the gospel
  - he transforms people's hearts to love God and love others
- God doesn't just want people following the letter of the law
  - He wants people who are captivated by him and his grace to us in the cross
  - And the HS helps us in a way that wasn't possible under the old covenant to have our hearts transformed by the amazing truth of the gospel
- **Work of Christ**
- The other critical difference in the effectiveness of the new covenant is the work of Christ
- Under the old covenant, God's people had Moses as their mediator
- Under the new covenant we have the perfect mediator
- For ...
  - Moses had access to God
  - Jesus Christ is from God
  - Moses was unable to see God face to face
  - Jesus is the only one to have seen God and makes him known
  - Moses sacrificed animals to atone for Israel's sin
  - Jesus sacrificed himself
  - Moses went up a mountain to receive the words of God
  - Jesus went up a mountain to receive the wrath of God
- And because Jesus is our one true mediator from God who lays down his life for us ...
  - His death is truly able to atone for sins
  - For as Hebrews 10:4 – *it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*
  - Only the death of a human can atone for human sin
  - And only the sacrifice of God himself can atone for the sins of the world
- What are the implications of the new covenant for us?
- **Perfect access**
- It brings us back to our dilemma earlier of our desire to see God
- Without Christ as our perfect mediator ... we'd be like the Israelites ... standing at the bottom of the mountain looking on ... with
  - no access to God
  - no ability to see God face to face and

- therefore no intimacy with God
- But in Christ ...
  - When we see Jesus ... we see God
  - For as Paul says in Colossians, that Jesus is the image of the invisible God and that all the fullness of God dwells in him<sup>3</sup>
- And it's because of that ... Jesus can say John 14:9 - *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*
  
- No other religion can make that claim
- No other religion can say they have seen God
- But in Jesus Christ, God came and walked this earth
  - God left his heavenly throne and came to **us**
  - The access to God we crave ... he made possible by leaving the cloud of glory, coming down from the mountain and coming to us
- And as we look to Christ ... his teaching, his miracles, the impact he had on his followers
- And most importantly in his death and resurrection for us
  - There we are given the ultimate access to God ... and the ultimate revelation of God
  
- And therefore ... this idea
  - That God is distant
  - That God is not real
  - That God cannot be experienced
  - That God is intangible
    - Is completely overturned ... because of Christ and all he has done
  
- And so for the person who would believe if they could see God
  - Well you need look no further than Jesus Christ
  - Who came from the Father and reveals the Father to us
  
- But our access to God is not just limited to knowing him through Christ
- Because through the new covenant, we have the promise of one day walking into the presence of God and see his glory with our own eyes
  - This is not Facebook access
  - Revelation 22:4 says we will actually see God face to face

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<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:15ff

- Unlike the fellowship meal on the mountain where it was only Moses and the 70 elders ...
- This time everyone who's shares in the blood of the new covenant will sit down at the great wedding banquet in heaven with the Lord
  
- That's the first thing the new covenant does ... it gives us perfect access to God
  
- **Transformed Obedience**
- The second thing the new covenant brings is transformed obedience
  - In Christ ... you and I can now live lives of obedience to the Lord
  - The transforming work of the HS will day by day renew / remodel / reshape your heart and its desires
  - The HS will enable, equip and empower you to love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself
  
- Yes we will fail
  - But we know that the blood of the covenant has covered over our sin
  - That by God's grace, our disobedience doesn't disqualify us from the blessings that come to us through the covenant
  - Nor will God see the covenant as a failure
- For the blood of Christ has sealed the deal
- And as we continue to
  - trust in Christ
  - follow in his ways
  - listen to him in his word
  - be led by his Spirit
    - we know that we will be transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory<sup>4</sup>
  - And on that day we will see God in all his glory ... face to face

## PRAY

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18