

THE GOD WHO PURSUES (3)

The Covenant with Moses

"I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God."

A. Introduction

"A covenant is a relationship, initiated and imposed by a superior, with life or death consequences."
(David Murray)

1. In the Bible there are FIVE major covenants that God made with people showing His desire to be in relationship with them.

Together these five covenants express and explain the ONE eternal covenant.

The eternal covenant is God's promise of relationship and eternal life through faith in Christ who obeyed the demands of the covenant and paid the penalty covenant breakers deserved.

2. With each of the five covenants (Creation, Abraham, Moses, David, New Covenant) the eternal covenant becomes clearer and more colourful.

3. God began by pursuing a relationship at creation with the people He made in His image.

He made a covenant with Adam, which promised the blessing of relationship with God and eternal life in God's presence if he loved, trusted and obeyed Christ as ruled over the world, and death and separation from God should he disobey Christ.

Adam broke the covenant and this resulted in death and separation from God as he is banished from the Garden of Eden.

God pursues and provides a way to have a relationship with people outside of the Garden by promising a Saviour who would undo the curse of sin through a sacrifice that takes the penalty of death instead of them.

God's people are those who love, trust and obey Christ, this promised Saviour.

By the time of Noah, very few people were trusting in Christ and the beautiful and good earth was ruined.

God cannot allow sin to go unpunished and judges it by destroying all of life with Flood.

4. God continues to pursue a relationship with people by providing a way for Noah and others who trust in the Saviour to be kept safe.

After the flood the covenant made at creation with Adam is reaffirmed with Noah.

Noah was to love, trust and obey God by ruling over the world.

But no human is able to keep this covenant, so the only way God can pursue and remain in a relationship with people, is if He preserves the earth until the Saviour arrives and if this Saviour takes the penalty of death, covenant breakers deserve which is pointed to, in the sign of bow pointed up at heaven.

The only way people can be in relationship with God is through faith in this Saviour.

By the time of Abraham, history has repeated itself and the family of Noah ended up in the same mess the family of Adam did, at Babel, to which God responds by scattering the rebellious people over the face of the earth.

For God to be in relationship with people, he needs to be a God who pursues and provides a way for this to happen.

5. God again steps in and pursues a relationship with people by preaching the gospel to Abraham.

"The Scriptures foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (Galatians 3:8)

"The LORD has said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:1-3)

"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." (John 8:56)

God promises blessing to Abraham – He will be a great nation with a great name – but this can only happen if he has a people, and place for them to live.

God also promises blessing to the world through Abraham and his offspring – the promised Saviour is going to be one of Abraham's descendants.

God confirms these promises by making a covenant with Abraham during which God says that He is willing to die on behalf of Abraham and his descendants if they fall short of the terms of the covenant.

Abraham is called to walk before God as His representative by being blameless, living in a right relationship with God and all that God has made (people/earth). As he and his descendants did that, they would show the world what God and being in relationship with Him is like and draw the nations to Him.

This would lead to Abraham becoming more than one nation and his descendants inheriting more than the land of Canaan.

But they were unable to keep this covenant, so the only way God can pursue and remain in a relationship with people is by promising an obedient son who would keep the covenant and pay the penalty covenant breakers deserve.

The covenant sign of circumcision pointed to the Offspring who would be cut off for them, and by undergoing circumcision they were identifying with Him. It was an outward sign of their inward need to trust in Christ.

The only way Abraham, his descendants and the people of the world can be in relationship with God is through faith in the promised Offspring who walked between the animals on their behalf, and who would be cut off because of their failure to keep the covenant.

The true descendants of Abraham are those, from Israel or the nations, who listen to the gospel preached to Abraham, and believe in Christ.

6. So with each covenant God made in history, more of the eternal covenant is revealed.

B. After the Covenant with Abraham

1. The covenant with Abraham included a promise of slavery for Abraham's descendants in a foreign country.

"Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years." (Genesis 15:13)

God kept this promise – as well as the promise about many physical descendants.

"Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them..." So they put slave masters over them..." (Exodus 1:8-11)

How could they be a great nation and bring blessing to the nations when they were slaves and without a land of their own?

But God had also promised He would rescue them from slavery.

"But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions." (Genesis 15:14)

God kept this promise too.

"During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them." (Exodus 2:23-25)

2. God kept His covenant with Abraham by providing a Christ-like Saviour – one who spoke God's Word, rescued the people from slavery, and led the people.

"There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush." (Exodus 3:2)

"God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:15)

Moses was a Saviour like Christ, but he told the people that Jesus is the one they must trust in, like he was doing.

"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." (Hebrews 11:26)

"Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that Jesus delivered his people out of Egypt." (Jude 5)

The people of Israel's rejection of Moses (and by implication Christ) showed that they deserved to be punished for their sins.

"On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands. And I said to them, "Each of you, get rid of the vile images you have set your eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in Egypt. But for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations they lived among and in whose sight I had revealed myself to the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt." (Ezekiel 20:6-9)

But when the Lord came to judge in Egypt, He sees that judgment has already come to some houses, and passes over them.

"The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

3. At Mount Sinai, we see God continue pursues a relationship with the people He was in relationship with through the covenant with Abraham, and who He had rescued from slavery in Egypt.

"Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'" (Exodus 19:3-4)

He does this by making a covenant with them – one that builds on the covenant made with Abraham.

"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (Exodus 19:5-6)

C. The Covenant with Moses

1. God promises Israel that if they keep the covenant they would be His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

They would be in a right relationship with God.

They would make known to world what God is like and what it means to live the way God created people to live – in a right relationship with Him, each other, and the rest of creation.

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:26-28)

“Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands.” (Genesis 9:1-2)

“The LORD has said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

Israel is given the role that Adam (then Noah) was given, that was passed onto Abraham.

Israel was to love, trust and obey God in response.

This was something they could not have done while they were slaves in Egypt.

“So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.” (Exodus 19:7-8)

2. The way Israel was to obey God, was to walk before God and be blameless.

This was God’s will for mankind from Genesis 1 through to Exodus 19.

What walking before God and be blameless means is made explicit in the 10 Words God gives to Israel.

“And God spoke all these words.” (Exodus 20:1)

3. The 10 Words explain what it means for God to be their God and for them to be His people.

Word 1-2: I will be your God.

Word 3-4: You will be my people in relationship to God.

Word 5-10: You will be my people in relationship to one another.

In Exodus 20:22-23:33 (the judgments), the 10 Words are applied to a number of practical situations.

4. A covenant making ceremony took place.

“When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the LORD has said we will do.” Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite

men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." (Exodus 24:3-7)

After Moses reports the 10 Words and the judgments, the people agree to the terms of the covenant and then they are splattered with blood.

"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." (Exodus 24:8)

The rightful penalty for any kind of covenant failure is death.

"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." (Galatians 3:10)

5. The problem is that even through the people of Israel agree to the covenant, they will be covenant breakers.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'" (Exodus 32:7-8)

They can't keep their end of the bargain.

So the law drove Israel to the sacrificial system and on to Christ who keeps the law and died to pay the penalty for those who break it.

"The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24)

The message of the covenant with Moses, then, like it was Abraham and Adam/Noah, is trust Christ who keeps the covenant and who will die to pay the penalty for breaking it.

The way Israel demonstrated this was by keeping the Sabbath.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so that you may know that I am the LORD who makes you holy.'" (Exodus 31:12-13)

"The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites for ever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested." (Exodus 31:16-17)

As well as providing an opportunity to remember God's creation and salvation, and to be refreshed, keeping the Sabbath reminded Israel of their need to keep the covenant (summarised in the 10 Words).

As they could never do this, keeping the Sabbath was a way of acknowledging their need to trust in Christ who would keep it for them, so they could enjoy the rest (salvation) He would bring.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

If they rejected Christ by rejecting the covenant, they would be cut off, which is what happened to the generation of Israelites who left Egypt and died in the wilderness.

So the covenant needed to be renewed with the generation that would enter the land, which is what happens in Deuteronomy, where instructions about how to live in the land are given to them, as well as warnings about what would happen to them if they failed to live this way (curse, exile and death).