

Contributions to the Theme of Covenant in Exodus

The Book of Exodus contains significant additions to the covenantal relationship between God and humans. God reveals more of himself and His plans for humankind.

1.A "New Name"

The first major contribution to the theme of covenant in Exodus is a "new name" given for God at the burning bush. Responding to the call to go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go," Moses asked whom he should say sent him. God declared His name to be "I AM WHO I AM" and instructed Moses to "say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (3:14).

Prior to this in Exodus, the allusions to God have been to "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (3:6) or to "the God of your fathers" (3:13). Thus, the Israelites, who were living in servitude in Egypt, recognized only the God who had made contact with their parents centuries before.

At the burning bush, God revealed a new dimension of himself. Instead of thinking of Him as the God of the

"covenant" in Exodus is the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.

From the beginning of the relationship between God and the Israelites, there have been no "general expectations" given by God to them regarding how they should live, behave, etc. God has made great promises to the patriarchs and their descendants, but any instructions given were strictly aimed at individuals and specific tasks (Abram told to migrate, Jacob told to go to Egypt, etc.). Now, for the first time, Israel has a set of moral and behavioral expectations: things God expects of all of His people.

While too many Christians have simply seen this as a list of "dos and don'ts," our perspective should be to a higher level. We need to see these "ten words" as an extension of the moral nature of our God; they reveal to us the things that are sacred in God's eyes. They tell us that our God has certain behavioral expectations that are reflections of His own moral nature. When we read, "Honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12), we should realize that God is saying the family relation-

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past, this God who made great promises to the patriarchs was to be present with them, and all that He "was," as the God of all power who was able to do what He said, was to be with them. He would walk with them through their dilemmas and deliver them. This name, YHWH, commonly called Yahweh and translated LORD in most Bible versions, added this "present" element to their thinking. It is similar to the references in Revelation to the God "who is, and who was, and who is to come" (1:8). He is the God who is continuing to be all that He is being, the "I AM WHO I AM."

2. The Deliverance and Birth of the Nation

The second major development to the theme of "covenant" in Exodus is the deliverance and the birth of the nation. In the original patriarchal promises, Abraham was promised that he would be the father of a large number of descendants. They would be as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16), the stars of the sky (15:5), and the sands of the sea (22:17). They would be a nation.

The generations in Egypt allowed them to grow from the extended family of 70 to thousands of persons, but what bound them together was their servitude. The crossing of the Red Sea (or "Sea of Reeds") would later be described as a birth analogy, giving birth to the nation. Through their deliverance by God, they would become bound together as a community of people. The Passover feast would become the primary festival of the Jewish nation, celebrating their deliverance from Egypt and their birth as the nation Israel.

3. The Giving of the Law on Mount Sinai

The third major development to the theme of

ships are sacred to Him, and they should be to you also. When we read, "You shall not murder" (v. 13), we should understand that God is saying that life itself is sacred to God and hence to His people also. Similarly, we learn that marriage is sacred to God, as are an individual's own possessions, and truth itself is sacred; since they are sacred to God, they should be to the "people of God."

So, with the giving of the Law, those persons who God claims as His own now have a set of behavioral expectations. Shortly after these are given, we begin to see the practical implications of obedience/disobedience and the rise of a conditionalism for the followers (i.e., *if* they obey, *then* they will be blessed).

4. The Tabernacle

The fourth major development in the concept of "covenant" added to Israelite thought is seen in the creation of a "tabernacle." The Israelites needed tangible lessons to impress them with God's truth; the Tabernacle is "God's house" to remind the people that God dwells with them and as it sets in the center of the camp, God's presence should be in the center of all things. Such Old Testament symbolism should remind Christians of how this fulfillment is seen in Jesus Christ.

The Tabernacle, as the place where God lives, will teach them many lessons about God's presence and how His people have access to Him and can approach Him.

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ACTION GOAL FOR UNIT 1

Unshackled: Living in Freedom

A 50-Day Adventure

September 7—October 26, 2008

The purpose of the action goal is to help us practice Christ-like living, and not just talk about it.

Shackled and Bound

Nobel Laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918—) was born in Russia just a year after the Bolshevik revolution. In spite of the atheism of the Soviet Union, Aleksandr was raised in the faith of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, in high school, he devoured the works of Lenin. By the time he was 17 or 18, he was completely won over by Marxist-Leninist thought. During his university years, he espoused the state ideology. When the Germans invaded Russia in World War II, Aleksandr served as an artillery commander, and was twice decorated for bravery.

In February, 1945, while serving in East Prussia, Aleksandr was summoned by his commanding officer. To his surprise, he was ordered to hand over his revolver and placed under arrest. He was sentenced to eight years in a labor camp, to be followed by permanent exile. What was his crime? He had criticized Joseph Stalin in a personal letter to a friend. Amazingly, in the gulag, Solzhenitsyn continued to espouse Marxist-Leninist beliefs.

Then Solzhenitsyn found himself imprisoned with a devout Christian named Dimitri Panin. In their vigorous discussions, Aleksandr found he could not sustain support for Marxism when confronted by the truths of Christianity. Aleksandr found his belief system crumbling.

From his prison cell, Solzhenitsyn reached out and took hold of faith, and it held firm. He had experienced the heartbreak of misplaced trust, so he returned to trust

in Christ alone. Though he was still in a Russian gulag, he found himself unshackled and free.

Unshackled and Free

Freedom is the heritage of every child of God. In light of the suffering and death Christ paid for that freedom, Paul tells us to exercise our freedom responsibly, and he warns us, “do not let yourselves be caught again in the shackles of slavery” (Galatians 5:1, PHILLIPS).

Free from bondage

- ▶ Do you live in bondage to sin?
- ▶ While you long for freedom, do you wonder how you will ever overcome the habit that holds you back?

Hear the good news: Christ can break the fetters of sin and set you free!

You say you’ve tried and couldn’t do it. That’s true. You can’t. But Christ in you can! He will not only forgive, His indwelling Spirit will empower you to overcome.

- ▶ If you long to be unshackled, will you commit to seek His overcoming power on each of these 50 days?

Free to serve

Paul writes, “You . . . were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13).

- ▶ If you have been unshackled, will you use your freedom to help someone as an act of Christian love on each of these 50 days?



Bill Manning
Editor

THE LESSON PLAN

The lesson plan for each session is divided into these four presentation sections.

1 engage interest

“Why is this important?”

Your participants come with a multitude of concerns. The opening activity should capture their attention and interest, and begin to move their thoughts to the Bible study topic.

[This section should take approximately 20 percent of your presentation; 5-10 minutes in a 45-minute session.]

2 explore the word

“What does God’s Word say?”

You will seek to discover the meaning of the Scripture passage within its particular context and setting by exploring thought-provoking questions and activities.

[This section should take approximately 40 percent of your presentation; 15-20 minutes in a 45-minute session.]

3 examine life

“How does this apply to us?”

You and your participants will apply the truths explored in the last section. In what ways should a Christian’s life be changed and rearranged by the biblical principles?

[This section should take approximately 30 percent of your presentation; 10-15 minutes in a 45-minute session.]

4 exercise your faith

“What should I do about this?”

Conclude with practical steps to put God’s truth into action.

This section allows your adults to make personal decisions and commitments to enact God’s Word in their lives.

[This section should take approximately 10 percent of your presentation; about 5 minutes in a 45-minute session.]