

Reading Plan

July

Covenant

Week Twelve

Monthly Description

YHWH desires that all of humanity would be reconciled into relationship with him. This relationship between God and his human family is called covenant. In covenant, God promises to care for and bless his people and we, his people, promise loyalty to him.

Covenant

Note: Daily descriptions in **bold**.

Weekly Description:

God has always expressed his desire for relationship with his creation through covenant. Throughout history, he has initiated renewals of that covenant, expanding its reach to include more and more of his human family in order to reconcile all willing people into relationship with him.

So what precisely is covenant? Like the word “redemption” from last week, covenant is often misunderstood in its modern use to simply be another word for a contract. But covenant in the ancient world, whether between kingdoms, tribes, or individuals, was not simply contractual (though there were obligations tied to covenant). There was a strong relational dynamic to ancient covenants that our modern legal, contractual language just doesn’t capture. Instead, the best modern examples of covenant we have are marriage and adoption. Ancient covenants were formal agreements into which two parties entered whereby individuals not related by blood chose to unite together as family, each taking up the responsibilities to uphold that familial relationship.

Anthropologists call this concept “fictive” or “chosen kinship”—the act of non-family, coming together as family to support one another as family does. This is the relationship God sought with humanity—to bring together those who were once estranged from him into the tightly knit bonds of his family, under his protection and care. Throughout this week we will examine the five benchmarks that lead us through Old Testament history, each benchmark sealed with a covenant between God and a biblical character (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David). These covenants underscore God’s design in reconciling humankind into his family through covenant. Jesus brought the covenant between God and humanity to its highest expression, opening the invitation to anyone and everyone to enter into relationship with God through his death on the cross. Now, anyone who demonstrates loyalty to Jesus the Messiah can inherit a place in God’s family.

Weekly Video:

The Covenants

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/covenants/>

Day One: God's First Covenant.

In Genesis 1 we find the first covenant made with humanity (often called the Adamic or Edenic Covenant). This expressed God's original creation design for humanity: that God's holy people would dwell in God's holy space and experience his holy presence. This covenant gave Adam and Eve free reign to do anything with the exception of the right to decide for themselves what was good or evil. That right and responsibility belonged to YHWH alone. We know that Adam and Eve attempted to obtain that right for themselves in rebellion and were ultimately banished from the garden. But God's design for covenant didn't stop there. We know that in and through the redemptive work of Jesus, covenant has been extended to YHWH's entire human family and that because of that redemptive work, we anticipate the certain return of Christ and the renewal of all creation—not as a *return* to Eden, but as the consecration and establishment of the New Jerusalem (or “New Eden”).

Genesis 1:26-31 (ESV)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,

¹⁷ 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.”

To read more about God’s first covenant, see Gen. 3:16-19; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 3:8.

Day Two: God’s Covenant with Noah.

The covenant YHWH made with Noah was the first covenant God made with a human after Adam and Eve rebelled in the garden. It is significant because it follows a great catastrophe brought upon the inhabitants of the earth due to the widespread corruption in humanity. It essentially “reintroduced” humankind to YHWH, their creator and God. The covenant God struck following the flood applied to all of creation (human and non-human like) and was unconditional in nature. YHWH’s covenantal promise was that he would never destroy the earth by flood again. Regardless of humankind’s action, God’s promise covenantal promise to Noah remains unconditional and was sealed with the sign of the rainbow.

Genesis 8:15-9:17 (ESV)

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ “Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” ¹⁸ So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. ¹⁹ Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. ²² While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

¹ And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. ² The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. ³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. ⁴ But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. ⁵ And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

⁶ “Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image.

⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth.

¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

To read more about God’s covenant with Noah, see 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Pet 3:10,11; Rev. 20:9; 21:1.

Day Three: God’s Covenant with Abraham.

YHWH’s covenant with Abraham was another unconditional covenant, like the covenant made with Noah in yesterday’s reading. YHWH himself passed between the halves of the animals in a vision given to Abraham (a “deep sleep”). This is a rich cultural custom of covenant ratification that indicated that God took sole responsibility to see the terms of the covenant come to pass. Whereas normally both parties assumed responsibility, God took the initiative in the covenant and the sole responsibility to mark Abraham as the father of the Jews and his descendants as YHWH’s own chosen nation. It was through Noah that God laid the groundwork to reintroduce humanity to himself and establish his eternal intent to pursue the reconciliation of his fallen people. It was then through Abraham that God brought that covenant to a higher expression, marking off for himself a people group where his glory might dwell to be a light to the surrounding nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 52:10; 60:3; John 8:12; Acts 13:47; 26:23).

Genesis 15:1-21 (ESV)

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” ² But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

³ And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward

heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

⁷ And he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.”⁸ But he said, “O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”⁹ He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.¹⁴ But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

To read more about God’s covenant with Abraham, see Gen. 12; 17.

Day Four: God’s Covenant with Israel.

The Law

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/the-law/>

YHWH’s covenant with Israel was similar to many “suzerain-vassal” covenants in the ancient Near East. A greater power (called a suzerain) would cut a covenant with a lesser power (called a vassal) by making promises of provision and protection in exchange for loyalty, devotion, (and sometimes monetary tribute). Built upon God’s covenant with Abraham, YHWH established the Mosaic covenant with Abraham’s descendants—the people of Israel. He promised to bring them into the land he swore to their ancestor Abraham as a place of inheritance, where his presence would dwell among them. He would be their protector and provider. In exchange they were to demonstrate their exclusive allegiance to God.

Deuteronomy 30:1-20 (ESV)

“And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you,² and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command

you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.

⁴ If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. ⁵ And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

⁶ And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. ⁷ And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. ⁸ And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today.

⁹ The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, ¹⁰ when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

¹¹ “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

To read more about God’s covenant with Moses, see Exod. 19-24; Deut. 28.

Day Five: God’s Covenant with David.

The covenant YHWH made with David was an unconditional covenant initiated by God and made through the prophet Nathan. We can clearly see the trajectory of God's redemptive plan through each of the covenants we have highlighted in this week's reading. In Adam's covenant, YHWH established his desire to dwell among his human family and that his human family would function as his image bearers to the rest of his creation. Following the rebellion of humanity, God begins his missional work to redeem humankind to covenantal relationship with himself. Through Noah, humanity is reintroduced to their creator. Through Abraham, God marks out for himself a people group to function as his light to the nations. Through Moses, God establishes this people group in the land of promise and establishes the dwelling place of his presence in the temple. And through David, God establishes the house through which he himself would one day take on flesh, in Jesus, and make the way for all humankind to be reconciled to himself.

2 Samuel 7:1-28 (ESV)

Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, ² the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." ³ And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."

⁴ But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, ⁵ "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in?' ⁶ I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling.

⁷ In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"' ⁸ Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel.

⁹ And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.

¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your

kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”¹⁷ In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

¹⁸ Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? ¹⁹ And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD. You have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD!

²⁰ And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! ²¹ Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it. ²² Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

²³ And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods?

²⁴ And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O LORD, became their God. ²⁵ And now, O LORD God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken. ²⁶ And your name will be magnified forever, saying, ‘The LORD of hosts is God over Israel,’ and the house of your servant David will be established before you.

²⁷ For you, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house.’ Therefore, your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. ²⁸ And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. ²⁹

To read more about God’s covenant with David, see 1 Chr. 17:11-14; 2 Chr. 6:16.