



CONNECTING THE DOTS: EDENIC COVENANT

At a baseball game a spectator wants to be as close to the action as possible. The best seats are back of home plate, or behind the dugout. But not so at a NASCAR race... I suppose if all you want to do is feel the power and rush of the cars, *you should bring some earplugs*, and sit as close to the track as possible. But if you're actually interested in the race, and you'd like to see which driver wins *and why* - you need a seat with a higher vantage point.

Views from the first five rows of the grandstand at a motor speedway are obscured by the catch-fence. The cars blur by. You're too low to see the overall action. The best seats are higher up – way above the asphalt. At most NASCAR tracks the prime seats are above row 20. At Daytona and Talladega you need to be no lower than row 40 - preferably higher. *And it's best to sit above a turn...* The premier seats at Dover and Bristol and Martinsville are at the entrance to Turn One. The Turn is where the action happens. When the cars enter a curve they slow down, and bunch up, and jockey for position. NASCAR racing gets more intense in the turns.

I say all this to point out that understanding the Bible is like taking in a NASCAR race. There are times when you want to be close to the action... You can learn a lot by putting yourself in Abraham's sandals when God tells him to sacrifice his son, Isaac... or by sampling Joseph's emotions when the brothers who sold him into slavery come begging for his help... Imagine yourself in the boat when Peter walked on the water... or what if you were a friend of Lazarus when Jesus raised him from the dead? There's a lot to gain by getting up-close and personal with your Bible.

But as with a NASCAR event if you're trying to understand the story of the Bible – if you're interested in who wins *and why* – then you need a broader perspective. You need a seat where you can see the entire track. And that's what I hope to bring you over the next eight weeks. We're going to see the whole book, *and focus on the turns...* Think of your Bible as a racetrack with seven major turns... *The race is won or lost in the turns... and the turns in God's story are His covenants.*

We'll begin at the starting line - "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But then comes turn one - God creates a **man and woman**, and plops them down in a plentiful Eden, *a garden paradise...* God and man enjoy fellowship. They have an understanding – agreed upon terms. We call it "a covenant." It was the first of God's covenants.

But the first couple, **Adam and Eve** sin and it shatter this relationship. They eat the forbidden fruit. Sin contaminates the human race. Man falls from his original innocence. Now the arrangements between *God and man* - between *man and woman* - between *man and nature* are altered. And God has to deal differently... He initiates another covenant...

Yet despite God's covenant with Adam, life on earth goes from bad to worse. God starts over. He floods the Earth, but saves **Noah's** family. When Noah exits the Ark he walks out into a frightful new world. Life is now very scary. Man faces new predators, and he needs new assurances. Another turn occurs in God's plan – He establishes a third covenant.

But sadly, Noah's heirs blow their second chance to please God. Mankind rebels and organizes *a global coup d'état*. God puts down the revolt at the tower of Babel. And it launches another turn in God's dealings. Rather than work with mankind as a whole, God now chooses a single family, and establishes a fourth covenant with a man named **Abraham**.

God's covenant with Abraham becomes the blueprint for all God's future plans. He'll save us and return us to a garden through this covenant. All the covenants are pivotal, but *the Abrahamic Covenant* is more so. We'll talk about it in a few weeks, but God made His friend, Abraham, three promises – *a chunk of land, a people, and a blessing*. Here's how we'll learn to remember the Abrahamic Covenant – *sod, seed, salvation*.

The final three covenants grow out of this one. *Let me admit what I'm about to say is oversimplification - I'll correct it later - but it's helpful here...* God makes a covenant with **Moses** that's about *the land – the sod*. He institutes a covenant with **David** that's about *the people – the seed*. The covenant **Jesus** activates is all about *the blessing – the salvation*. But these three final covenants - even our salvation - grow out of the seminal covenant God made with Abraham... *Remember, where you'll find the action at a race?... In the turns...* And God makes His moves through His covenants. They mark seven turning points in His dealings with man.

Think again of the racetrack... The start flag drops... At turn one God creates man and establishes a relationship with him... But coming out of the first turn man crashes. God makes a new arrangement with Adam. But man crashes again... and God makes another covenant with Noah. Once more we crash and sin. This time he strikes a deal with Abraham. *Get the idea that human beings crash a lot?... After Abraham, there're three more curves*. God amplifies His covenant by making additional arrangements with Moses, and David, and Jesus.

And it's this last covenant – **the New Covenant** – that takes us back to where we started – to a Garden Paradise. *But it's not the same garden... It's better, it's eternal*. Revelation envisions our eternal state – and there's a river, and fruit, and trees. There's even the tree of life. After Adam sinned, mankind was barred from that tree, but in the end of God's covenantal plan we're sitting under its shade, eating its fruit, living forever.

We're going to learn the story of the Bible is not just one of **retrieval** – of returning us home. It's a story of **redemption** – which is far better. We come home, but we get there in better shape than when we left! Surely, the Bible is full of interesting and important details – God colors between the lines – but when you connect the dots the story of the Bible is capsulized in seven dramatic turns – in seven suspense-filled covenants!

Today we'll tackle the first of those covenants – **the Edenic Covenant**. But before we go further let's make sure we know what we mean when we speak of a **"covenant."** *A covenant is an agreement between parties.* It's **"an arrangement of relationship"** - the terms that guide our interactions.

I think it's helpful to distinguish between **a covenant** and **a contract**. When the United States expanded westward our government signed treaties with the Indians. The Indians thought they were making *covenants*. Sadly, our government saw those agreements as *contracts* to be broken.

It reminds me of the old Indian Chief sitting by his teepee on the reservation when he was approached by a government agent. The agent asked him, **"Chief Two Eagles, your people signed treaties with the white man, but it didn't work out so well for the Indian. What went wrong?"** Chief Two Eagles answered, **"When Indian in charge... no taxes, no debt, plenty buffalo, plenty beaver, medicine man free, Indian brave hunt and fish all day, and Indian squaw do all the work around the teepee."** The Chief leaned back, took a long drag on his peace pipe, and finally sighed, **"White man dumb enough to try and improve on system like that!"** I'm sure there's a lot we could learn from the Indians, *and the sacredness and specialness of a covenant would be one of those lessons.*

A **contract** is an agreement entered into out of suspicion. The *contract* is needed because the two parties don't trust each other. A contract limits my responsibility, and clarifies the least of what is expected. Whereas a **covenant** is a commitment born out of trust and respect. It's an agreement between folks who love each other. The covenant lays out a goal, and the role each party plays to achieve that goal. It's a pledge to do whatever it takes to work together for the common good.

When you **buy a house** you sign a *contract*. The seller is afraid *you won't pay all he's asking...* You're afraid *you won't get all you're buying...* To avoid being cheated the parties are protected by a legal agreement. But when you **enter a marriage** you're not just signing a *contract*, you enter a *covenant*. You embark on a relationship with someone you love, and who loves you. A covenant outlines expectations - but it doesn't limit commitment. A covenant is based on love and real love is limitless. **Contracts are based on fear. Covenants are all about faith.** And it's always been God's desire to have a *covenant relationship* with His people. A *covenant* is a faith-based relationship between God and us.

And to really grasp God's covenants we need to know God... The God of the Bible is a personal, relational God - not some inanimate force. Don't think of God as spiritual electricity – *just plug into the God-socket and get a jolt.* No... God is a person. He wants to know and be known. God desires genuine relationship. *He walked with Adam in the cool of the day.*

The Bible reveals to us that the true God is a triune God - one person existing in three distinct persons – *Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit*. Which means God exists in relationship. *The Father loves the Son. The Son pleases the Father. The Spirit magnifies the Son*. The Bible declares “**God is love.**” And from eternity past God has dwelt in a loving relationship.

This is why throughout the Bible God is always depicted in relation to His people. He’s *our Husband...* Or *our Father...* Or even *our Shepherd...* God always reveals Himself in the Bible through relationships. This is why the only way to really apprehend theology is in the context of relationship. Try to decipher doctrine in the abstract and confusion reigns.

Think of predestination and free will. You’ll rack your brain reconciling these doctrines, until you put them in the context of a parent and a child. A parent knows what’s best for his kid, but he also wants his kid to learn to make wise decisions. There were times when I allowed my children to choose - all the while I was framing it in a way that determined their choice. My point is, understanding relationships is the key to good theology. God’s will and ways are best grasped in the context of His relationships.

Ultimately God’s love sought for an object outside of Himself to love. This is why He created human-kind... God fashioned *the heavens* and *the earth*... He sculpted *heavenly bodies* and *heavenly beings*... He made *times* and *seasons*... He spawned *flora* and *fauna*... But all that God created was intended to support the apex of His handiwork – *the man*.

The man was the only one of God’s creatures made in His image. *His creation reflected His handiwork - but man was stamped with His image*. God loved the man and woman. He bestowed on them privilege and honor. He put them in charge of His creation, including angels. They ruled with God. Of all He created, God chose to partner, *or covenant*, with man.

And the rest of the Bible is the working out of a series of covenants God uses to engage man in relationship with Himself. This speaks one truth very clearly – **God is determined to have a relationship with man!** He refuses to let *our sin* spoil *His salvation*. God is relentless in His attempts to *reach us*, and *convict us*, and *forgive us*, and *redeem us*.

This is the primary reason you were conceived and created. Some people think God made humans to *serve Him*, or *speak for Him*, or *praise Him* - but His angels can do that far more efficiently than us. If you haven’t yet discovered the reason you exist... *here it is...* the God in heaven - the God who created mankind - *wants a relationship with you!*

Yet God isn’t interested in just any type of relationship. God always arranges a relationship by instituting a covenant. Before God enters a relationship He insists on an understanding. We enter in on an agreement. Terms are laid out. Boundaries are set and expectations established. And God is the person who sets those terms. God doesn’t allow you or me to decide what type of relationship we’d like with Him. Some folks try to relate to God “*a la carte*”... *they pick from a menu the commands they’ll keep, and the details they’ll believe...* but God is the Covenant-maker. God dictates the terms of our fellowship – not us.

It’s interesting, everybody today – *from politicians to porn stars* – claim to have a relationship with God. But it all depends on their adherence to God’s covenant. God won’t hang out with folks until they accept His terms. And it’s God’s covenants throughout the ages that have given mankind a picture of what it really looks like for man to be in relationship with God.

Of course, the idea of *covenant* – that God needs to structure or *order* a relationship with us implies that left to ourselves life can get “out of order.” In a perfect world there would be no need to draw up a covenant. Yet from the outset of the Bible we realize we no longer live in a perfect world. The Bible consists of 1,189 chapters, and it takes just three, before God’s perfect utopia goes haywire. The man and woman sin and rebel.

In fact, you get a hint of trouble in the second verse of your Bible... You know verse 1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” But verse 2 reads, “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.” *This is not what we would expect...* Throughout Genesis 1 after each aspect of God’s creation we’re told that it was “good.” Verse 31 sums it up by saying, it was all “very good.” But in verse 2 the earth is “without form, and void...” In other words, “unformed and unfilled.” The Hebrew phrase is “*tohu wabohu*.” The terminology usually describes the aftermath of judgment... like a battlefield after a battle... or a town after a tornado... In Genesis 1:2 the earth is a shapeless, empty, ominous mess... just a vast sea of chaos and darkness.

It reminds me of three professionals... A doctor, an engineer, and a lawyer were all arguing over whose occupation was considered the oldest. The doctor noted that God performed surgery on Adam to create Eve. He opened up Adam’s side - proving the medical profession was oldest. The engineer though pointed to creation. In just six days God started with chaos and confusion, and constructed the universe... *That’s when the lawyer jumped in.* He said, “Where do you think the chaos came from?”

Isaiah 45:18 casts a light on Genesis 1:2, “Thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited...” Notice, God says in Isaiah that the Earth was not created “in vain” - or “*tohu*.” It’s the exact same Hebrew word used in Genesis 1:2. Genesis 1:2 says the earth was created *unformed* and *unfilled* – Isaiah says it was created *formed* and *inhabited*. So, which is it? Perhaps it was both! *I believe a gap of time exists between verses 1 and 2 in Genesis 1...*

Often we’re asked, “when did God create the angels?” The Bible isn’t precise, but in Job 38 God quizzes Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?... When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” The phrase “*sons of God*” are a Hebrew idiom for “angelic beings.” The implication is the angels were created before God goes to work on the earth in Genesis 1:2.

We also know from Scripture that one of the top-echelon angels sinned. Isaiah 14, and Ezekiel 28, and Revelation 12 describe Lucifer’s fall. The name “*Lucifer*” means “light bearer.” Lucifer was a radiant creature. *Perhaps the embodiment of light.* Ezekiel implies he was heaven’s worship leader - until pride entered his heart. He tried to steal praise from God. Revelation 12 tells us a third of the angels joined in Lucifer’s revolt. In Luke 10:18 Jesus stated, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

Let me admit, what I’m about to say is speculation – but it makes sense. It could be that God created the heavens and the earth – then Satan fell and plunged the creation into darkness and chaos. Lucifer’s fall caused a horrible judgment that damaged God’s original creation, and left the earth *unformed* and *unfilled*. Thus, Genesis 1:2 is essentially a *recreating* of the heavens and earth.

There is a Hebrew tradition which explains why Lucifer fell. He got wind of God's plan to create man from the dust of the ground – and give him dominion over all His creation. This meant one day the glorious Lucifer would be serving dust mites, hair balls. *No way could he let that happen...* Consumed with pride and envy Satan launched all-out war on God. *And where did he strike?* His first move was to stop God's creation...

Notice in Genesis 1:2 darkness is on the face of the deep, while God's Spirit hovers over the waters. *It seems that battle lines have been drawn...* Job 26 speaks of creation in an unexpected way, *“(God) hangs the earth on nothing. He binds up the water in His thick clouds... He stirs up the sea with His power, and... breaks up the storm. By His Spirit He adorned the heavens; His hand pierced (or twisted) the fleeing serpent...”* *What a scene...* God wrestles with a serpent as He creates the world. An arrogant Satan didn't want to serve something as humble as mankind, so he tried to thwart God's designs for us. We don't usually think of creation as a battle, but it was the first skirmish in a long-running war.

When you think about it this is strangely flattering. Despite all the spectacles in our vast universe the spiritual realm is focused on a single nondescript galaxy – one of 100 billion. Out of that galaxy's 300 million stars heaven's attention is on one solitary star. Of that star's nine planets, angels and demons are focus on just one. And of the Earth's two million species of living creatures all eyes are glued on you! *So often we feel worthless and bored. Why get up in the morning?* But the heavies of the universe are locked in mortal combat over you and me. There is a celestial battle raging in the heavens and mankind is the prize. Author Mike Russ puts it, *“One of the few things God and Satan agree on is that we are immensely valuable...”* Remember, God is after a relationship with us, and His means of achieving it is through *covenant*.

After God's creation, *Satan the serpent* appeared again. This time in Genesis 3 to tempt man... *If Satan can't stop God's creation he'll try to spoil it...* But the battle continues to rage on down through the centuries... When you study world history remember there's a back story that's not written in the history books. Behind the scenes a war is raging for the souls of men and women. Beyond the politics, and conflicts, and personalities, and ambitions – a spiritual war against God is being waged by Satan...

Often in the Scriptures we get glimpses of this spiritual battle... **Psalm 74** describes Israel's exodus from Egypt. The psalmist speaks of the serpent of old re-emerging in the waters of the Red Sea opposing Israel's crossing... **Revelation 12** fast-forwards to the end of the age, and depicts the serpent attacking God's people Israel... In **Revelation 13:1** the Antichrist is depicted as a beast rising out of the sea to deceive the world... Here's the point, from beginning to end the Bible is the story of a battle... Satan's desire is to *destroy* mankind, while God is determined to *restore* mankind to a relationship with Him... and His means is *covenant*.

The first covenant God made with man was in the Garden of Eden. God situated Adam and Eve in Shangri la – a utopia – in an oasis named *Eden*. The man and the woman were perfect... Adam always took out the garbage. Eve never griped or complained. There was plenty of fruit to eat. The first couple never argued. They enjoyed unbroken harmony and intimacy. They were servants to each other. Their sinless minds were oblivious to their own needs; so much so they lived naked and unashamed. Believe it or not, Adam had a job! Eden had 0% unemployment. God placed Adam in charge of His creation. Adam had dominion and authority. As I mentioned earlier, God stamped the man and woman with His image. Like God they were *rational*, and *relational*, and *moral*, and *spiritual*. Part of His likeness in man was **the authority to rule**. Though man is to submit to God, he was also made to share God's dominion over nature.

This is what distinguishes Western Civilization from Eastern Cultures. The Christian West was reared on biblical thought – God is separate from nature, and He’s given humans the job of subduing and harnessing nature for man’s benefit. As a result the West advanced technologically. Whereas, the East is dominated by pantheism – that god is a part of nature. Thus, rather than subdue nature, man’s role is to be one with his surroundings. This is why cows feed off crops while people starve to death, and why Indian traffic gets tied up by free-roaming elephants. Hinduism, as well as Animism, teach it’s adherents to deify nature rather than subdue it. Sadly, the worship of oneness is prevalent in our country’s pop religion. What we believe does matter. It’ll hold us back or cause us to advance.

“Made in God’s image...” has multiple meanings, but none is more important than the idea of *self-determination*. Like God, man has a free will. We can decide for ourselves. Humans can choose to *love or hate, give or take, bow down or bow up, serve or be selfish, obey or go our own way*. And to allow Adam and Eve to live out this aspect of His image, God planted “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Its fruit was forbidden. God told Adam if they nibbled off this tree “they would surely die.” In a sense, history is about *two trees*. The tree in Eden where man died to innocence, and broke off his relationship with God. And another tree, on Calvary, where Jesus died to ultimately restore what man had broken.

There were perhaps hundreds of trees in Eden with permissible fruit. Including “the tree of life.” Adam’s fountain of youth was a tree and fruit. God only restricted one tree. *And this is still God’s practice...* He gives us tremendous liberty. God packs our world with good gifts, and encourages us to enjoy His goodness. Taboos are few and far between. Yet Satan twists the truth. Listen to the Tempter and he’ll have you ignore God’s blessings, and get fixated on the few pleasures God forbids.

Hear how the Serpent tempts Eve in Genesis 3:4. First, he tempts her to doubt *God’s Word*... “You will not surely die.” Then the devil tempts her to doubt *God’s Love*... “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” And this is how he tempts us – to doubt *God’s Word* and *God’s love*... Satan accuses God of holding Eve back - keeping her down. He’s labeled God a hindrance to the good life. If Eve wants enlightenment she’ll need to shed God’s authority - march to her own drummer - find herself... Satan tempts Eve by telling her that she can be like God. *But she was already “like God.”* She was God’s image-bearer. *She was like God, but she was not God.* And this is what Satan attempts to confuse. It’s one thing to reflect God, it’s another to take the place of God. Mankind occupies a rung on the ladder that’s always just below God. If we try to scale too high, and usurp the place of God, and act like our own god – *death will result*.

And die they did. Eventually both Adam and Eve would die physically. Death corrupted the human gene pool... But first, they died spiritually. When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he and his wife became separated from God. Sin drove a wedge between the man, and the woman, and God. The opening act of the Bible teaches us that *life* blooms when we *trust God* - and deadness, physical and spiritual death, results when we don’t. Rather than freedom, Eve ended up a puppet of Satan, and a slave to her sin. The key to life is not *autonomy from God*, but *dependence on God*.

I read one author who said when mankind fell, he “fell upwards.” Adam didn’t slither and slide into a cesspool of shameful sin. He stuck out his chest and tried to ascend to a higher plane – but he did it on his own. In essence, he said he didn’t need God. He could be his own god. This is the mistake people still make. They get educated, or pride makes them think they know-it-all. They assume they no longer need God. John Stott writes, “The essence of sin is man substituting Himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for man.”

The covenant God made in Eden was to test the man's love for Him. God placed Adam and Eve in the perfect environment – gave them a perfect job, God made them co-rulers of His world. But then He placed the forbidden fruit within man's reach so Adam could demonstrate his love. Hey, for love to be meaningful it has to be voluntary. You have to choose to love. If you love me, but have no other choice, it's a hollow love. If Kathy had taken her wedding vows with the nose of a shotgun stuck in her back I would always wonder... *And that's why God gave Adam one prohibition.* By not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Adam could prove how smart he really was by *loving and trusting God.*

Instead Adam chose unbelief. Rather than trust God to have his best interests at heart, Adam viewed God as the bad guy. And this is the root of all sin. Do we *trust God*, or *doubt God*? Do we *hope in Him*, or *rely on me*? Adam's tragic decision plunged all mankind into sin. Adam and Eve and their descendants were booted from the garden. Genesis 3 says a special-ops angel guarded the tree of life so Adam and Eve couldn't return and eat its fruit... If they had, they would've lived forever in a fallen, sinful condition. It was grace for God to block their path.

Sadly, in Genesis 3 Satan succeeded in killing Adam and Eve – at least spiritually – he baited them into throwing away their relationship with God. It's been said, “Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit and it put all mankind in a jam...” But God responded – as He always does - with *a covenant.*

Throughout the Bible, God is never content *without* a relationship with man. Despite our *willfulness*, He's always *warning, wooing, working* to restore us. And at every turn a God-given covenant comes to our rescue... It'll take another covenant conceived by God to renew Adam's hope of salvation. We'll look at *the Adamic Covenant* when we meet next week...