

GOD'S COVENANTS

THE EDENIC COVENANT

At a baseball game a spectator wants to be as close to the action as possible. The best seats are directly in back of home plate, or behind the dugouts.

But not so at a NASCAR race...

I suppose if all you want to do is feel the power and rush of the cars - 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."*

Watching from there the cars blur-by, and sitting that low you can't see the overall action. That's why the best seats are higher up, way above the asphalt.

At most NASCAR tracks the prime seating is 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, Bristol, and Martinsville are at the entrance to Turn One. The Turn is where most of the action is.

When the cars enter a curve they slow down, bunch up, and jockey for position. NASCAR racing gets more intense in the turns. You pay attention to the turns.

I say all this to point out the fact that understanding the Bible is like taking in a NASCAR race...

In studying Scripture at times you want to be close to the action... You 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 as a slave return to him begging for his help... Imagine, sitting in the boat when **Peter walks on water**... or if you were at **Lazarus' grave** when Jesus raised him from the dead?

There's a lot to gain by getting up-close and personal with your Bible... actually putting yourself in the stories.

But as with a NASCAR event if you want to see the big picture - *the whole of the Bible* - if you're interested in who wins and why - you need a broader perspective.

You need a seat where you can see the entire track.

That's what I hope to bring you over the next eight weeks. We'll take a broader vantage point. We're going to see the whole book... **and focus on the turns...**

Think of your Bible as a racetrack with 7 major turns.

We 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, in a garden paradise...

God and man enjoy fellowship with each other. They have an understanding - *agreed upon terms*. Call it "**a covenant.**" It's an arrangement between God and man.

Yet the first couple, Adam and Eve sin and it shatters that relationship. They eat the fruit that God said was off-limits. Their 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 now God has to deal differently with the human race, so He initiates another covenant...

Yet despite the gracious agreement God constructs to maintain His relationship with man, life on earth goes from bad to worse. God even has to start over.

He chooses Noah. God floods the Earth, but saves Noah's family. And when Noah's family exits the Ark they walk out into a frightful new world. Life is scary.

Humanity now faces new predators, and people need new assurances. Another turn occurs in God's plan. God establishes a third covenant with mankind.

But sadly, Noah's heirs blow their second chance to please God. Humanity 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 humanity as a whole, God now chooses a single family through whom He'll reach the world. He makes a fourth covenant with 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 even more so.

We'll talk about it in a few weeks, but God made His friend, Abram, three promises: **a chunk of land, a people, a blessing**. Here's how we'll learn to remember the Abrahamic Covenant - **sod, seed, and salvation**.

God's final three covenants grow out of the one He made to Abram. *Let me admit, what I'm about to say is oversimplification. I'll correct it later, but it's helpful now.*

The covenant God makes with **Moses** involves **the land (the sod)**. His covenant with **David** focuses on **the people (the seed)**. And **the new** covenant God established by Jesus is **the blessing (our salvation)**.

But all three of these final covenants grow out of the seminal covenant God made with Abraham...

Remember, where you'll find the action at a race is *in the turns*. And in the race of redemption God makes His strategic moves through His covenants. They mark **seven turning points** in His dealings with mankind.

Think again of a racetrack. The green starter's flag drops... At turn one God creates the human race - a man and a woman and puts them in *a garden*. He establishes a relationship with Adam and Eve...

But coming out of the first turn the humans crash, and God establishes a new arrangement with Adam.

But man crashes again. This time God makes a covenant with Noah. Then we sin again... This time an extremely patient God strikes a deal with Abraham.

After Abraham, there are still three more curves in which God amplifies His covenant by making additional arrangements with Moses, and David, and Jesus...

And it's the last covenant, the New Covenant, that takes us all the way 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 forever state, and there's a river, and fruit, and trees.

There's even the tree of life. The last time in Scripture we saw this tree was after Adam sinned. He and his offspring were barred from this tree. But at the end of God's covenantal plan we see ourselves sitting under its shade, and eating its fruit, and 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. Mankind comes home, but we return in better shape than when we left!

Clearly, the Bible is full of intrigue and calculated detail. God colors between the lines. But when you put the story of the Bible together it's summed up in seven dramatic turns - in seven suspense-filled covenants!

Tonight, we'll tackle the first of those covenants: **the Edenic Covenant...** But before we go further, let's be sure of what we mean when we speak of a "covenant."

A covenant is an agreement between parties.

Call it "an arrangement of relationship." It constitutes the terms that guide the partner's interactions.

I think it's helpful to distinguish between a [covenant](#) and a [contract](#)... When the United States of America expanded westward our government signed many treaties with the Indians. Often, the Indians thought they were making covenants. Sadly, our government saw those agreements as contracts to be broken...

It reminds me of the old Chief sitting by his teepee on the reservation when a government agent approached him and asked, "[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 replied, "[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 sighed, "[White man dumb enough to try and improve on system like that!](#)" I'm sure there's a lot we can learn from the Indians - and the sacredness and specialness of a covenant is 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's expected.

Whereas a [covenant](#) is a commitment born out of trust and respect. It's an agreement between folks who often love each other. A covenant outlines what both parties can do 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 your buying... To avoid being cheated the parties are protected by a legal **contract**.

But when you **enter a marriage** you're not just signing a contract, you're entering into a **covenant**.

You're embarking on a relationship with someone you love, and who loves you. A covenant outlines the expectations, but it doesn't limit our 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 you need to know God! The God of the Bible is relational - He's not some impersonal force. Don't think of God as spiritual electricity. You don't plug into the God-socket and get a heavenly jolt. God is a person. He wants to know and be known. God desires genuine relationship with people. **God walked with Adam in the cool of the day.**

The Bible reveals to us that the true God is a triune God. He is one being who exists in three distinct persons - *the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit*.

Which means God has always existed in relationship! *The Father loves the Son... The Son pleases the Father... The Spirit magnifies the Son...*

The Bible declares that “**God is love.**” From eternity past God has always dwelt in a loving relationship.

This is why throughout the Bible God is always depicted in relation to His people. He was Israel’s **husband**. He’s our **Father**. Even our **Shepherd**. God reveals Himself in the Bible through relationships.

And this is why **the only way to really apprehend theology is in the context of relationships**. Try to decipher doctrine in the abstract and confusion reigns.

Think of the thorny subject of predestination and free will. *God chooses, but we have a choice...* You’ll rack your brain trying to reconcile 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 children to learn to make wise decisions.

When my children were small, I allowed them the opportunity to choose; while at the same time I was framing their options in ways that directed their choice. For example, they could choose their friends, but I placed them with people who made good friends. They could choose, but in a sense their friends were chosen.

My point is, you best understand theology through relationships. God’s will is best grasped in the context of the relationships and covenants He forms with people.

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 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 and the woman.

The humans were the only members of God's creation made in His image. His creation reflected His handiwork, but man was stamped with His very image.

God loved the man and woman. He bestowed on them great privilege and honor. He put the humans in charge of the rest of His creation, including the angels.

Humanity was to take dominion over all that God had made and rule by His side. **Of all God created, He chose to partner - or covenant - with mankind.**

And the rest of the Bible is the working out of a series of covenants that God uses to engage man in relationship with Himself. *This shouts a profound truth.* **God is determined to have fellowship with man!**

God refuses to let our sin spoil His salvation.

He 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 represent 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 all things and mankind - wants a relationship with you!*

And God isn't interested in just any type of relationship. He always arranges a relationship by instituting a covenant. Before God enters a relationship with us He insists on an understanding, an agreement.

Terms are laid out. Boundaries are set. Expectations are established... **And God is the person who sets those terms.** God doesn't allow you or I to decide what type of relationship we'd like to have 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 in reality it all depends on their adherence to the terms of God's covenant. God isn't going to pitch in and hang out with folks until they accept His terms!

This is why it's God's covenants - throughout the ages - that have given mankind a picture of what it really looks like for us to be in relationship with God.

Of course, the idea of a covenant - that God needs to structure or *order* a relationship with us implies that left to ourselves, we've become "*out of order.*"

In a perfect world with perfect people there would be no need to draw up a covenant. Yet from the outset of the Bible we learn we no longer live in a sinless 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 against God.

In fact, you get the first hint of trouble in the second verse of your Bible... You know verse 1 by heart, "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." In fact, verse 31 sums up all of God's creation by saying, it was all "very good."

But in verse 2 the earth is "without form, and void..."

In other words, the earth was "unformed and unfilled." The Hebrew phrase is "tohu wabohu."

The terminology usually describes the aftermath of judgment. Imagine, a battlefield after a battle... or a town after a tornado... the landscape is obliterated.

In Genesis 1:2 the earth is a shapeless, empty, ominous mess - just a vast sea of chaos and darkness.

Which reminds me of three professionals... A doctor, an engineer, and a lawyer - they 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 the oldest.

The engineer though pointed to God's creation of the heavens and earth. He pointed out that in just six days God started with chaos and confusion, and constructed the universe... Surely, his was the oldest profession.

But that's when the lawyer jumped in. He said, "Where do you think the chaos came from?"

Isaiah 45:18 casts an interesting 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 says the earth was created **unformed** and **unfilled**, yet Isaiah says it was created **formed** and **inhabited**. Which is it? Perhaps both! I believe a gap of time exists between verses 1 and 2 in Genesis 1.

Some folks ask, "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 that the angels were created before God goes to work on the earth in Genesis 1:2.

We also know from Scripture that a top-echelon angel - an archangel - sinned. Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and Revelation 12 describe Lucifer's fall from heaven.

The name "Lucifer" means "light bearer."

He was a radiant creature. This angel was the worship leader in heaven until pride entered his heart. He tried to steal praise and glory from Almighty God.

Revelation 12 tells us a third of the angels joined in Lucifer's revolt. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 10:18, "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 Lucifer or Satan's fall caused a horrible judgment that damaged God's original creation. It left the earth unformed and unfilled.

Thus, Genesis 1:2 is essentially a recreating of the heavens and earth. The universe is created out of nothing in verse 1. Between verses 1 and 2 Satan is judged. And in verse 2, God begins His reassembly.

It's interesting, in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." the Hebrew word translated "create" is "bara" which means "out of nothing." Whereas in Exodus 21:11, speaking again of God's creation, it reads, "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth." The term "made" is the Hebrew word "asah" which means "to assemble." It's an arranging of preexisting materials. *And both ideas fit the theory.* In verse 1 God creates from nothing. While in verse 2, in the aftermath of

Lucifer's fall and judgment, God reassembles what He initially created.

There is a Hebrew tradition which explains **why** Lucifer fell. Supposedly, he got wind of God's plan to create man from the dust, and give him dominion over all creation. This meant one day the glorious Lucifer would be serving dust bunnies - *human hair balls*.

No way could Satan let this happen... Consumed with pride and envy he launched all-out war on God.

And where did he strike first? His first move was to stop God's reassembly of creation... In Genesis 1:2 darkness - which is symbolic of evil - is on the face of the deep - while God's Spirit is hovering over the waters. It seems that battle lines have been drawn...

Job 26 also speaks of creation in a similar, yet unexpected way. Verse 7 reads, **“(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 the fleeing serpent...”**

Here's a curious version of the creation story... God wrestles with a serpent in the sea, and pierces him as he flees, while God is hanging the earth on nothing.

Apparently, an arrogant Satan didn't want to serve lowly humans, so he tried to thwart God's designs for us. We don't often think of the creation as a battle, but evidently 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. And out of that galaxy's 300 million stars heaven's attention is on one solitary star.

And 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 humans feel worthless and bored. *Why get up in the morning?* But the heavyweights of the universe are locked in mortal combat over us. There is a celestial battle raging and we are 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 as the serpent, appears again. This time in Genesis 3 to tempt man... If Satan can't **stop** God's creation, he'll try to **spoil** it... *which sadly he did.* He tempted the man to join his rebellion.

And the battle continues to rage down through the centuries... When you study world history remember there's a **back story**, not written in the history books.

Behind the scenes an intense war is raging for the souls of men and women. Beyond the politics, and conflicts, and personalities, and ambitions is a spiritual war against God being waged by the serpent Satan...

And throughout the Bible we get glimpses of this spiritual battle... [Psalm 74](#) describes Israel's exodus from Egypt. The psalmist speaks of the serpent of old in 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... And in [Revelation 13:1](#) the Antichrist is depicted as a beast rising out of the sea to deceive the entire world...

Here's the point, **from beginning to end the Bible is the story of a battle!** Satan's desire is to **destroy** humanity, while God is determined to **restore** humanity to a relationship with Him. And a never-failing God ultimately does so through a series of [covenants!](#)

The first covenant God made with mankind was in the Garden of Eden. God situated Adam and Eve in Shangri la - a utopian paradise - an oasis called Eden.

They always had plenty of fruit to eat. There were no diseases or strange viruses threatening their health.

The man and the woman were a perfect pair... Adam always took out the trash! Eve never griped. The first couple never argued. They enjoyed unbroken harmony and intimacy. They served each other. Imagine, their sinless minds were oblivious to their own needs; so much so they lived naked and unashamed.

Believe it or not, Adam even had a job! Eden had 0% unemployment. God had placed the man 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, relational, moral, spiritual. And part of God's likeness is **the authority to rule**. Though man is to submit to God - like God, he's made to have dominion over nature.

This is what distinguishes Western Civilization from the East. The Christian West was reared on a biblical worldview - God is separate from nature, and He's given humans the job of subduing and harnessing nature for the benefit of mankind. As a result Western culture has advanced in technology and science.

Whereas the East is dominated by pantheism - that god is a part of nature - one with nature. Thus, rather than subdue nature, man's role is to become one with his surroundings. This is why cows feed off India's crops while people die of starvation, and why Indian traffic gets tied up by free-roaming elephants.

Hinduism teaches its adherents to deify nature rather than subdue it. Understand, a society's religion will either hold it back or help advance its development.

"Made in God's image..." has multiple meanings, but none is more important than the idea of **self-determination**. Like God, humans have a free will.

We can decide for ourselves. Human beings 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 a tree in the Garden. He told them they

could eat fruit off any tree in Eden except this one - “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

God told them if they nibbled fruit from this particular tree - the one forbidden tree - “they would surely die.”

There were dozens of trees in Eden with edible fruit. God only restricted one. And this is still His practice. He allows us tremendous liberty. God packs our world with good gifts. Negatives are few and far between.

Yet Satan is able to twist the truth. Listen to the Tempter and Satan will have you ignore God’s blessings, and fixate 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 he 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 continues to tempt us - to doubt **God’s Word** and **God’s love**...

Satan accuses God of holding Eve back - keeping her down. He labels 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 His place.

Man occupies a rung on the ladder that's always just below God. 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. Their sin introduced death into 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 man and God, and the man and the woman.

The opening act of the Bible teaches us that life blooms when we trust God - whereas deadness, physical and spiritual death, result when we don't.

Rather than freedom, Eve ended up a puppet of Satan, and a slave to her own 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 into a cesspool of shameful sin. He stuck out his chest and tried to ascend to a higher plane, **but on his own.** In essence, he said he didn't need God. He could be his own god.

And this is the mistake people still make today. They become educated - or pride makes them think they know-it-all. They assume they no longer need God.

Theologian 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. God made them co-rulers of His world. But He also placed the forbidden fruit within the man's reach, so Adam could demonstrate his love.

Realize, 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 a husband takes wedding vows with a shotgun in his back you have to wonder if he truly loves the girl...

And that's why God gave Adam a choice. By not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he could prove how much he loved and trusted God.

Instead Adam chose unbelief. Rather than believe God to have his best interests at heart, Adam saw God as the bad guy. This is the root of all sin. [Do we trust God or doubt Him? Do we hope in Him, or rely on us?](#)

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 they couldn't return and eat its fruit... If they had, they would've lived forever in a fallen, sinful state. It was grace that blocked their path.

Sadly, in Genesis 3 Satan succeeds in breaking up the relationship between God and humanity. I've heard it said, ["Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and ended up in a jam..."](#) But God didn't leave them there. He responded - as He always does - with a covenant.

The Bible teaches that God is never content without a relationship with mankind. Despite our willfulness, He is always warning, wooing, working to restore us. At each turn a God-given covenant comes to our rescue...

It'll take another covenant conceived by God to renew Adam's hope of salvation. And we'll look at [the Adamic Covenant](#) when we meet next week...