

5. COVENANT

(Genesis 12, 15)

We have discussed the first two parts of the story of the Bible:

1. CREATION, where God makes the universe and fills and organizes it (Genesis 1 - 2).
2. CORRUPTION, where human rebellion brings corruption into God's good creation (Genesis 3).

The first two parts of the story give us a foundation for answering several of the "big questions":

1. In Genesis 1 - 2, the stories of creation:
 - a. **What is God like?**
 - b. **Who are we?** (What are WE like? What does it mean to be human?)
 - c. **Where are we?** (What is the world around us like?)
2. In Genesis 3 - 11, stories about Adam & Eve's sin and the consequences:
 - a. **What is the problem?** (Why is the world not the way it is supposed to be?)

We noticed how God fills different roles in the different parts of the story:

1. **In Genesis 1 - 2, God is creator, king, provider.** He shows these things by the way he organizes creation and provides for it.
2. **In Genesis 3 - 11, God is king and judge.** We see these parts of his character through the way he enforces the commands he has given, and punishes those who break them.

We also noticed how, even as he punishes those who sin against him, God always seems to be looking for a way to redeem the sinners.

- How did I define *redeem, redemption*?

- What does God do that shows that he is acting as redeemer?

This is a consistent aspect of God's character. Throughout the Bible, Old and New Testaments, God DOES punish sin and condemn sinners, but he is also always (ALWAYS!) looking for an opportunity to show grace, to heal and restore, instead of condemning.

“God as a redeemer” comes into focus in the next part of the story, which begins in Genesis 12. This is where God’s “rescue mission” begins to unfold, as God makes a covenant relationship with a man (Abraham) and his family (Israel).

Covenants are like contracts.

- Both involve an agreement between at least two people.
- Both deal with what each party will do for the other.

The biggest difference between covenants and contracts is what they focus on.

- Contracts focus on what the two people or groups will exchange, and the exchange is an even exchange. The people do not need to have any relationship outside the exchange.
- Covenants focus on the relationship between the two people or groups. The exchange might be important, but the relationship is central.

Things that are unique about covenants:

- The people (or groups) in covenants are not equal to each other.
 - One is usually more powerful than the other.
 - The more powerful person initiates the contract.

Here is a chart that summarizes the differences:

	Contracts	Covenants
Where is the focus?	Exchange of items of equal value, <i>quid pro quo</i> .	The relationship between people or groups
What object is exchanged?	The parties are exchanging <i>stuff</i> .	The parties are exchanging themselves. They belong to or become part of each other.
What is the proper result?	Parties get what they deserve and deserves what they get.	Parties show & receive mercy, grace, mutual commitment, because they belong to each other.

Look at Genesis 12.1-4.

- What does God do for Abraham?

- What does Abraham do for God?
- Is what Abraham does for God equal to, greater than, or lesser than what God does for Abraham?

- Does Abraham *earn* the blessings by obeying God?

- What does Abraham's story to this point teach you about your relationship with God?

- What would your Christianity be like if your relationship with God was a contract?

- Why is it important that your relationship with God is a covenant, NOT a contract?