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INTRODUCTION

This study guide will be most helpful if you work through it slowly with an open Bible, looking up all the references. Grab some friends and do it together!



ברית

COVENANT

διαθηκη

“Covenant” is an English translation of a Hebrew (*berit*) and Greek (*diatheke*) word that describes a formal relationship between two parties who agree to a set of promises so they can work together toward a common goal.

There are a number of biblical stories where people make covenants with each other:

ABRAHAM & ABIMELEK	...make an agreement about access to wells for watering animals.	GENESIS 21:22-34
ISAAC & ABIMELEK	...make an agreement to have peaceful relations and not attack each other.	GENESIS 26:25-32
DAVID & JONATHAN	...make an agreement to protect each other from Saul.	1 SAMUEL 23: 13-18
DAVID & THE ELDERS OF HEBRON	...make an agreement that they will follow David and acknowledge him as king.	1 CHRONICLES 11:1-3
SOLOMON & HIRAM	...make an agreement to keep their kingdoms in a peaceful and productive relationship.	1 KINGS 5:10-12

These stories show how covenants can fulfill many different purposes, but they all involve some greater goal that the two parties will work towards. The Covenants theme video traces the 4 covenants God makes in the Old Testament and how all those agreements are fulfilled in Jesus and the New Covenant he initiates.

The Garden

While the word “covenant” isn’t used in Genesis 1-3, the relationship God initiates with humanity in the garden is very similar to a covenant:

GOD’S PART	HUMANITY’S PART
<p>God provides the world-garden as a gift to humanity, and appoints them as divine image-bearers who will oversee it.</p> <p><i>GENESIS 1:26-28</i></p>	<p>Humans are tasked with caring for and cultivating the garden and to trust God’s knowledge of good and evil over their own attempts to define right and wrong.</p> <p><i>GENESIS 2:15</i></p>

THIS IS WHAT WE THINK GENESIS 2:16-17 MEANS, SEE THE GENESIS 1-11 VIDEO


Humanity fractures the relationship by suspicion that leads to rebellion, which results in exile from the garden into a world where work and family are as much a burden as a blessing.

GENESIS 3

Noah

GENESIS 8,9

After purging his world of humanity's evil, God makes a covenant with Noah and all creation, opening up a new future for God's good world based on his promises.

GOD'S PART	NOAH AND CREATION'S PART
<p>God promises that despite humanity's continued tendency towards selfishness and evil, he will not destroy them or his world like this ever again. Rather the earth will become a reliable place where God will work out his purposes to rescue everyone and everything.</p> <p><i>GENESIS 8:18-21 AND 9:8-11</i></p>	<p>Nothing. God doesn't require a darn thing. He just states his promise, and signs it with a rainbow!</p> <p><i>GENESIS 9:12-17</i></p> 

“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

GENESIS 8:22

Abraham

GENESIS 12, 15, AND 17

God selects Abraham from among the nations scattered at Babylon, and makes promises to him that will eventually restore his blessing to all humanity.

GENESIS 11

GOD'S PART	ABRAHAM'S PART
<p>God promises to bless Abraham, meaning that he will have a huge family that will inherit a promised piece of land in Canaan. And somehow, God will bring his blessing to all humanity through this family.</p> <p>GEN 12:1-3, 6-7</p> <div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>A SYMBOL THAT THIS FAMILY'S FERTILITY AND FUTURE LAY IN GOD'S HANDS.</p> </div>	<p>Abraham is asked to respond to God's promises in a number of ways:</p> <div style="background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Trust God's promises and follow him wherever he leads.</p> <p>GENESIS 12:1, 15:1-6</p> </div> <div style="padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Train up his family to do what is just and right by following God's commands.</p> <p>GENESIS 18:16-19</p> </div> <div style="background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 10px;"> <p>Circumcise all males in his family as a "sign of the covenant"</p> <p>GENESIS 17</p> </div>
<p>THE GREATER GOAL</p>	

God repeats his promises to Abraham and his descendants that through this family, somehow, he's going to bring his blessing upon all nations

GENESIS 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14

Israel

EXODUS 19-24

God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt and promises to make them into a kingdom of priests that he will use to show himself to all nations.

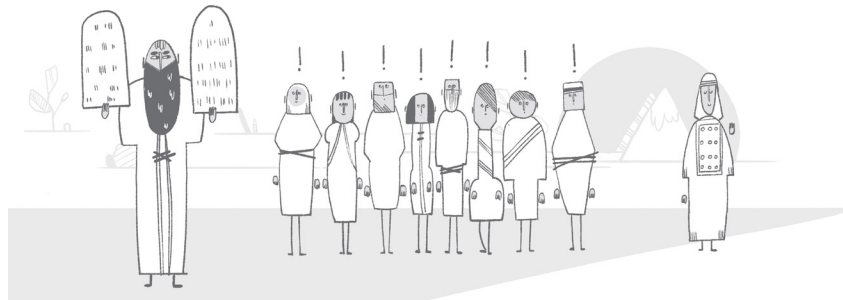
EXODUS 1-15

GOD'S PART	ISRAEL'S PART
<p>He rescued them by his grace, and promises to come and personally dwell in their midst and bring them into the land promised to Abraham.</p> <p>EXODUS 3:7-20</p>	<p>Obedience to the terms of the covenant embodied in the laws given by God at Mt. Sinai (including the 10 commandments)</p> <p>EXODUS 20-23</p>

THE GREATER GOAL

God has chosen Israel as a covenant people to make them into a priestly nation that will follow him and so represent God's character to all nations.

EXODUS 19:1-6



David

2 SAMUEL 7, PSALMS 72, 89, 132

God establishes David as the king over Israel and promises that the promises to Abraham and Israel will be fulfilled in his royal lineage.

1 SAMUEL 16
THRU
2 SAMUEL 6

GOD'S PART

He will make David's name great and keep Israel in the promised land, and after David dies he will raise up a descendant who will build a temple and a kingdom that will last forever.

2 SAMUEL 7:10-16

DAVID'S PART

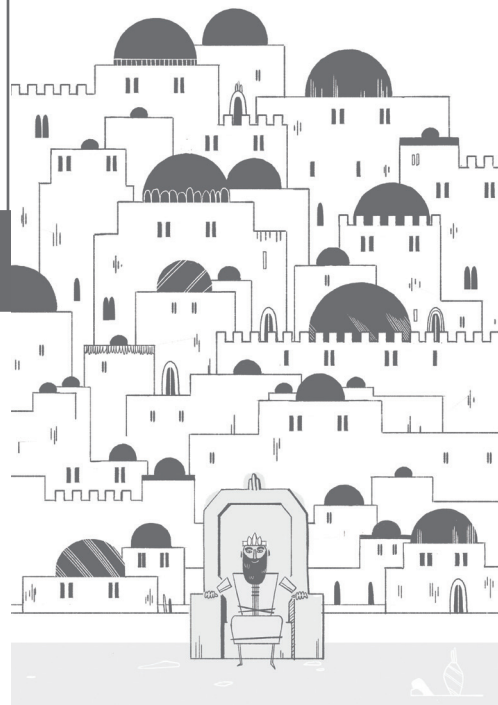
He and his descendants must remain faithful to God and lead all Israel in obedience to the laws of the covenant.

PSALM 132:11-12

THE GREATER GOAL

God will use this future descendant of David to bring the kingdom of God of justice and peace over all nations, so that the blessing of Abraham may come to all people.

PSALM 72:1-17



Exile and the New Covenant

The story of Israel in the promised land is told in the books of Joshua thru 2 Kings. Israel fails to live by the terms of the covenant, and their kings are unfaithful to the covenant made with David.

Israel loses their land and is sent into exile in Babylon.

2 KINGS 17 AND 24-25

However, Israel's prophets looked forward to a day when God would still fulfill all his covenant promises to fulfill the greater goal of blessing and hope for all nations:

ISAIAH

...still hoped for a future king from the line of David who would come and establish God's kingdom over all nations

ISAIAH 9, 11

...and bring God's new "covenant of peace"

ISAIAH 54:10, 55:3

...and become a "light to the nations."

ISAIAH 42:1-7

JEREMIAH

...saw a day coming when God would make a new covenant and all of God's people would have their hearts transformed and be able to know and obey God from a place of joy and not duty.

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

EZEKIEL

...looked for a day when God would place his own Spirit in the hearts of his people and empower them to love and obey the terms of the new covenant.

EZEKIEL 36:22-32

Jesus and the New Covenant People

Jesus saw himself as fulfilling these prophetic promises and called people to become part of the new covenant people. Jesus said his death would seal the new covenant and inaugurate God's kingdom and new covenant people.

MATTHEW 5-7, LUKE 4:14-20, 22:19-22

The Gospels all claim that Jesus is Israel's God become human to fulfill both God's part and Israel's part of the Covenants:

COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

Jesus lives by trust in the Father and teaches his new family of disciples to do what is just and right, and so becomes a source of blessing for all nations.

MATTHEW 4, 5-7, 28:18-20

COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

Jesus is the truly obedient Israelite and empowers his followers to become truly obedient by following the lead of his Spirit.

*MATTHEW 5:17-48,
ROMANS 8:1-11*

COVENANT WITH DAVID

Jesus is the king from the line of David ...who inaugurates God's kingdom in his life, death, and resurrection, and promises that his Spirit will be present with his new covenant people to lead them into obedience.

*MATTHEW 1
LUKE 24:36-48
HEBREWS 8-10*

Jesus' disciples, now made up of all nations, are the family of Abraham, the new covenant people who follow the Spirit of Jesus into a life of freedom and blessing.

GALATIANS 3:23-29, 5:16-25

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Think through the definition of “Covenant” on page 2 of the study guide, then read Genesis 8-9 about God’s covenant with Noah and all creation. Notice that God’s makes some big promises but asks for nothing in return? Why is this unique? What does this tell us about God’s purposes to save all creation?

GENESIS 8-9

2

Read Genesis 15 about God’s covenant ceremony with Abraham. Notice that Abraham is asleep on the ground while God performs the ceremony by himself. Why is that significant? What does it tell us about God’s purposes and how they will be fulfilled?

GENESIS 15

3

Read Exodus 19:4-6, God’s words to Israel about his covenant with them. What are the implications of Israel being a kingdom of priests and holy nation? What do priests do? What does it mean for Israel to be a nation of priests to other nations? Look up 1 Peter 2:9-10 and see how Peter uses this language to describe the new covenant family of Jesus’ disciples.

EXODUS 19:4-6
1 PETER 2:9-10

4

Recall God’s covenant with David and read Psalm 72. This poem is all about the hope for a future king from David’s line who will fulfill the goals of the covenants with Abraham and Israel. How so? What parts of the poem connect with these previous covenants.

PSALM 72

5

Read through Luke’s account of Jesus’ last (Passover) meal with his disciples. How does Jesus see his impending death as fulfilling the whole covenant storyline?

LUKE 22:7-22

6

How does the author of Hebrews see Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection as the fulfillment of all the ancient covenant promises?

HEBREWS 8-10

