



# Family Bible Lessons

## Biblical Themes Lesson 2: Covenants

### Review and Introduction

In Lesson 1, we learned how Biblical Themes are threads that run through the whole story of the Bible and lead us to Jesus. The first theme we looked at was Image of God. We are all made in His image but have failed to reflect his image due to our sin. Jesus is the perfect image of God, who transforms our hearts so we can once again bear his image.

In this lesson, we are going to explore the relationship between God and humans in the Bible. If you have ever been to a wedding, you usually see the groom and bride make promises that they commit to keep so the marriage can be strong and beautiful. That's a little of what it looks like in the Bible with God and humans, only the biblical writers call it a covenant. Through the whole story of the Bible, we will look at how God makes covenants with humans, and the humans...well, let's watch a video and see what happens.

### Video: Covenants

Watch Covenants (5 minutes) - <https://youtu.be/8ferLlsvlmI>

### The First Covenant: Noah

You might have heard the story of Noah's Ark before. You might have a picture in your head of a big boat filled with all kinds of animals. But this is a sad story. Humans had become so evil to each other that God started over with Noah and his family. All the rest were wiped out in this flood. God is loving and patient, but eventually, he will judge those who do evil. He will not watch it forever. But after the waters dry up and Noah leaves the boat, God makes this incredible covenant with him.

Read Genesis 9:8-17 (ESV):

*Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, 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. 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." 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: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 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. 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." 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."*

With this covenant, God makes a promise to Noah and all humans that he is committed to seeing humans become like him once again. He knows that humans will be sinful and reject him. His judgment will one day come, but it would never come again in a flood like this. The rainbow is his promise to humans that he loves us and will always seek to rescue us.

## **The Second Covenant: Abraham**

After Noah, humans start filling the earth again, and just as God said, they would reject him again. So once again, God chooses one man and his family out of the many: Abram, later known as Abraham. God promises him that he will make of him a great nation through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed, that they would inherit the land he stood on. But Abram is old and has no children. He wonders how this will happen.

Read Genesis 15:9-20 (ESV):

*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." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 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." 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. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

*As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. 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. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."*

*When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 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, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."*

First of all, this is a strange story, and you might have a lot of questions with what is happening here. We can't focus on all of them, but in those days, covenants could be set up between humans like contracts. The two parties would come together and divide the animals like God told Abram to do. They would then walk through them together. What they were saying was, "May I be cut in two like these animals if I don't keep my end of the covenant." That's the kind of promise God is making to Abram. Notice what happens in this story. God walks through the pieces as a smoking fire pot and flaming torch, but Abram does not. God knows Abram's family will be unfaithful. So God puts all the binding of the covenant promise on himself alone. He would be faithful to keep it, no matter what.

*If your children need to take a break, this is a good stopping point.*

## **The Third Covenant: Moses and the nation of Israel**

Just as God promises to Abraham, he had a child. That child became a nation. That nation became slaves and afflicted for 400 years in Egypt. But the Exodus story tells us that God rescued them from slavery through his servant Moses. After they left Egypt, they came to Mt. Sinai, the same mountain where God called Moses to lead his people. They spent an entire year at this mountain. Guess what they end up doing there? God makes a covenant, this time with the entire nation. This really was like a marriage story. God gives the

people the Ten Commandments, followed by several more. God would care for and love his people, and he desired that they would love him in return. So Moses shares all of this with the people.

Read Exodus 24:3-8 (ESV):

*Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

Israel accepts God's covenant! They would be his people, and the world would be blessed! But about 40 days later, the people broke the covenant and worshipped an idol. They broke his heart. He might have even given up on them. But Moses pleads with God to be faithful to his covenant promise he made to Abram back in Genesis. God forgave the people, though they did face the consequences. This would play out in Israel's history over and over again.

#### **The Fourth Covenant: David and his kingdom**

Centuries later, God again chooses one man out of Israel through whom he will work incredible things. He raises up the shepherd boy David to be king over all Israel. When David becomes king and sets up his throne in the city of Jerusalem, he desires to build God a house. Since the days of Moses, God's dwelling with his people had been in a fancy tent. But God says to David, "Thanks but no thanks. In fact, instead of you building me a house, I'm going to build you one."

Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16 (ESV):

*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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 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, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."*

God promises David that his kingdom would last forever, that someone from his line would reign on his throne for all time. It is a beautiful promise. But as we keep reading the Bible, we find out that David's sons do not have David's heart for God. The kingdom of Israel split in two, and while a few kings were faithful, most abandoned God. Eventually, God's judgment fell, and Israel was taken into exile. There was no king on David's throne. We might even be tempted to think God broke his promise. But the prophets said that a day

was coming when someone from David's royal line would reign and his kingdom would last forever. In fact, God tells the prophet Jeremiah that one day, he would make a new covenant, one that would draw the hearts of his people to him. The centuries pass, and all seems quiet. And then, God fulfilled his greatest covenant.

### **The New Covenant: Jesus, King of Kings**

As we learned last lesson, Jesus was God as a human. So far in the story of the Bible, God has been faithful to all his covenant promises, but there was never a human who responded with love and obedience to him. Jesus is that human. At every turn of his life, when he could have chosen to live as other humans lived, he humbled himself and served others first. He was completely obedient to the will of the Father.

On the night before he was to be crucified, Jesus was gathered with his disciples celebrating the Passover meal. At a certain point in the feast, he tells his disciples something really important. Paul recounts it this way.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (ESV):

*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

What was God willing to do to fulfill all his covenant promises? He was willing to give his Son. Jesus would bring the new covenant Jeremiah declared, but it would come only as he laid down his life for sinners like you and me. This King from the line of David, the nation of Israel, the family of Abraham, would be nailed to a criminal's cross so that the world might be rescued. God's covenant promises bring both justice on sin and mercy for sinners. They meet in the person of Jesus. He rose again from the dead and promises the covenant will be fulfilled when he returns. He has taken up his rightful seat next to the Father, and he reigns over heaven and earth.

### **Response**

So how do we respond to God's covenants?

1. You break God's covenants like all humans do. God has made a way for you to enjoy his covenant faithfulness through Jesus. Repent of your sin and follow the crucified and risen King Jesus.
2. Count God's covenant promises as your dearest treasures. Even following Jesus, we can stumble and fall into sin. But he loves us with steadfast love and faithfulness.
3. Remember Jesus' new covenant. When you attend church and the Lord's Supper or communion is being held, we are remembering Jesus's covenant through the symbols of the bread and the cup, his body and blood. May we never forget the great cost of this covenant love and the promise that he will one day return to reign. Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again!

### **Review Questions with Your Family**

*These are designed to help children ages 8-18 to review before taking their individual Google quizzes.*

1. What is the word the Biblical authors use to describe God's promises and commitment to his people? *Covenants*
2. To whom did God make the first covenant recorded in the Bible? *Noah*
3. What sign did God give to remember the first covenant? *A rainbow*
4. How long did God tell Abraham that his would offspring would be afflicted in a foreign land? *400 years*
5. What items represented God as he walked through the covenant animals with Abraham? *A smoking fire pot and a flaming torch*
6. On what mountain did God meet with Israel to make his covenant? *Mt. Sinai*
7. What did Israel do 40 days after agreeing to God's covenant? *The made and worshipped an idol*
8. To whom did God make a covenant to establish his kingdom forever? *David*
9. Through which prophet did God promise that one day he would make a new covenant? *Jeremiah*
10. What symbol did choose to represent the new covenant of his blood? *The cup*
11. What did Jesus say his followers are proclaiming when they eat the bread and drink the cup? *The Lord's death until he comes*

### **Praying the Scriptures**

One of the joys of reading the Bible is praying its words back to its Author. We encourage you to read the Bible passage below and make it your prayer.

Read Hebrews 13:20-21 (ESV):

*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Prayer:

*Dear Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for all the promises you made to your people through the Bible. Thank you for remaining faithful to your covenants. Thank you for sending Jesus to make a new covenant with us so that we can truly know you, obey you, and love you. Please equip us to do your will. Work in us your covenant through King Jesus. May he receive all the glory for it. Amen.*

### **Google Quiz**

- Children in your family who are ages 8-18 can now take their Google quiz for this lesson.
- Parents, you should receive an email when each child completes their quiz, so you know it has been completed.
- Take the Google Quiz: <https://forms.gle/kTzZ9u5C2m38hu5u9>