

The Covenant: God's Good News to Israel
Small Group Discussion Notes
Pastor Scott Wieking
April 30, 2009

Group Talk: Agree/Disagree

1. The Gospel (Good News) is primarily about how to go to heaven.
2. The Gospel is primarily relational, not informational.
3. The Gospel is primarily for unbelievers.
4. The Gospel is simple to define and easily understood.

First impressions: Exodus 19:1-7

"Few pages in the literature of mankind compare to this awesome description of an encounter with God and man." Samuel Terrien

Breaking Down the Covenant
Exodus 19:1-8

The Covenant

"At the heart of Jewish belief is the conviction that the one God, YHWH, who had made the whole world, had called Abraham and his family to belong to him in a special way. The promises God made to Abraham and his family, and the requirements that were laid on them as a result, came to be seen in terms either of the agreement a king would make with a subject people, or sometimes of the marriage bond between husband and wife. " Tom Wright, Paul for Everyone

Ex. 19 is a renewal of God's covenant with Abraham, a far reaching agreement that touches our lives today. Let's look at how God describes his Covenant with his people.

Divine Initiative

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. **Deut. 7:6-9***

"Have you ever heard that grace is only a NT concept? That the God of the OT is harsh and severe? Have you ever heard that God's people in the OT had to measure up before they could "earn" God's favor? That only with the coming of Jesus is the grace of God displayed? Well, that's all nonsense. Passages like this one quickly disabuse us of those misconceptions. God's dealings with humanity have always been infused with grace, with unmerited favor, from the days of the Garden, to the toils of Egypt, to the thunder at Mt. Sinai, and onwards to the work of the Christ and beyond. It's always God

who takes the initiative, who pursues the rebel, who makes a way for reconciliation. Grace is always the first word. Grace is always the last word. Grace is the foundation. Grace is everything.” D. Vinson

Human Response (-ibility)

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

Covenant as a Football

The Ten Commandments are not law, they are grace. God is telling us how life is meant to be lived.

God the Great Risk Taker

The fundamental description of Yahweh is as “the Holy One of Israel.” Describing Yahweh as the Holy One is as close as the Bible can get to a literal statement about God, for the phrase describes God in God’s otherness. To add “of Israel” is to say something that risks undoing the expression “Holy One”; the title as a whole threatens to deconstruct. It puts the Holy One into a relationship with a non-holy entity, a relationship from which apparently Yahweh has no exit. It radically compromises [by radically revising] the notion of holiness. The separate one becomes the attached one.

John Goldingay, Isaiah, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2001), 14-15.

In choosing Israel, God was seeking such a relationship. He wanted what any parent wants: a happy household of children who return their parent’s love.... God uses Hosea’s unhappy story to illustrate his own whipsaw emotions. That first blush of love when he found Israel, God said, was like finding grapes in the desert. But as Israel broke his trust again and again, he was forced to endure the awful shame of a wounded lover. His words carry a tone not far from self-pity: “I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah.” The powerful image of a jilted lover explains why in his speeches to the prophets, God seems to change his mind every few seconds. He is preparing to obliterate Israel – wait, now he is weeping, holding out open arms – no, he is sternly pronouncing judgment again.” Philip Yancey, Disappointment with God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 97-98.

The New Covenant: God’s Good News to Us

That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Romans 1:15-16

Debrief Agree/Disagree:

The Gospel is primarily about how to go to heaven.

The Gospel is primarily relational, not informational.

The Gospel is primarily for unbelievers.

The Gospel is simple to define and easily understood.

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth. Col. 1:6

From this text we learn a few things about the gospel.

- It is a living thing.
- It is planted in us so that it can bear fruit.
- It continues to grow in us and renew us all life long.

Recommended Readings

- Pastor Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York
 - *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Dutton, 2008).
 - “The Centrality of the Gospel”
http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Centrality_of_the_Gospel-Keller.pdf