

**LIVING THE LIVING WORD**  
**Bible-Based Bible Study and Application**

**Grace Chapel**  
**Orange, CA**

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## **CONTRACT AND LAW**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

We opened last week with the Creation, noting the following important points:

- Language and reality meet in God's creation; language can truly describe reality.
- Man was made to live dependent on God. Man is to start with what God reveals, and then use his reason and senses on that basis. Only in that way can we arrive at truth.
- Man, even fallen man, can understand what God has to say to him.

In this lesson, we will continue our quick-march through biblical history, beginning with the aftermath of the Flood and moving through the call of Abraham and the Egyptian captivity to the Exodus, Sinai, and ending with the instructions to the conquest generation in Deuteronomy. Of course in this kind of survey, we will be touching only a few of the high points.

This period of biblical history is punctuated by a series of divinely-established contracts and laws, so we will pay particular attention to the nature of these things. In order for contracts and laws to function, certain basic things have to be true about language, and about the parties involved. In this session, we will explore the nature of contract and law as it relates to the Bible.

Before beginning, I need to make one quick note about the term "covenant." We don't often use that word in modern society, and so we tend to think of it as some sort of strange spiritual thing (in other words, we don't really know what it means.) A covenant is a contract, pure and simple.

### **2. LINGUISTIC DEPENDABILITY IN CONTRACT AND LAW**

#### ***The Contract with Noah***

In Genesis 8:21-22, God takes counsel with Himself again as He did before the creation of man. Beginning in Genesis 9:1, He instructs Noah and his family on their responsibilities in the newly-cleansed world. In 9:8-17, God makes promises, and it is these promises we want to examine more closely.

There are a few key things we should observe about this passage:

1. God establishes the contract not only with Noah's family (i.e., humanity), but with the animals as well.
2. The substance of the contract is a promise not to repeat the Flood.
3. The duration of the contract is *forever*; God promises *never* to flood the whole earth again.
4. God sets the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the contract.

What does God have to control, in order to keep His promise here? He has to have perpetual control of the earth's environment, but it doesn't stop there. Events beyond the earth could cause a flood, such as a comet striking the earth, severe tidal fluctuations caused by the moon coming much closer to Earth, and so on. If you follow this line of reasoning out, the conclusion is that God must have control of the whole universe in order to make good on this promise. Not only that, but he has *certain* control *forever* in order to make a perpetual promise.

Now, let's consider this contract in light of a couple of common assertions today. You'll often hear silly "intellectuals" assert that it's impossible to tell what a linguistic expression really means. We dealt this idea a death blow from the creation account last week, but let's consider it again. What good would it do for God to make this promise to Noah, and even set the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the promise, if Noah couldn't quite really tell exactly what God meant? If Noah couldn't be sure that God *really* meant that He would *never, ever* flood the whole earth again, what would be the point of all this?

Let's consider a second idea. The more canny "intellectuals" will argue that language changes over time. Of course, in that particular place and time, the language meant something, they'll say. But what? We're far removed from that time and place, so how could we really know? There's a little more substance to this one, because it's true that usage of words changes over time. "Embarrass" used to mean "prevent," "weird" used to have to do with fate and magic, and "objective" and "subjective" have effectively traded places; they used to have exactly the opposite meanings that they do today. How do we know all this? Because we pay attention to the history of the language, and therein lies the key to answering the objection. Whatever the language of the contract means when the contract is signed, *that's what it means for the duration of the contract*.

This is just common sense. Imagine a situation with me. You own your home, and your homeowner's insurance insures your home against fire. So one night you wake up to the smell of smoke and the sound of the smoke detectors. You get your family out safely, but your house burns to the ground. When you submit your claim to the insurance company, they tell you that they're not paying, because they promised to insure your "home." See, what really makes a house a home is family, and your family is safe; it's just your house that burned down, so they don't really owe you any money. This is ridiculous, right? This is not what the language of the contract meant when the contract was signed. *And so it can't be what the*

*contract means now.* You can't change the meaning of the contract while it's in force; otherwise, what's the point of even having a contract?

Exactly. The point of a contract is to measure behavior according to a predetermined standard, in order to guarantee that certain promises are kept. What would be the point of having this contract that endures for the lifetime of the earth, unless its meaning is both fixed and understandable for the lifetime of the earth? So the very existence of the contract with Noah bears testimony to the fact that the language of the contract has meaning, that the meaning does not change, and that it is accessible to us.

### *Babel*

In Genesis 11:1-8, God confuses the languages. (Keep this story in mind when we get to Acts 2—there's a big point to be made there.)

In the meantime, consider the contract with Noah again in this light. God made the contract with Noah about 5000 years ago in whatever the pre-Babel language might have been. That language may have been basically Semitic in its structure, but it wasn't classical Hebrew; at best it would have been some sort of proto-Hebraic dialect. So when Moses and the Holy Spirit record the contract with Noah about 3500 years ago, writing in classical Hebrew, that clearly demonstrates that the meaning of the contract can be transferred successfully into a different language.

### *The Contract with Abraham*

#### **The Call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)**

In God's initial contact with Abram, He gives instructions and makes promises, but doesn't formalize them as a contract.

#### **Elaboration and Formal Ratification of the Contract (Genesis 15:1-21)**

Notice the circumstances under which God formally ratifies the contract. Abram has been operating on the basis of the promises God made, and thus far he is getting very rich, but there is no sign of a legitimate heir, and he owns no real estate. Abram is beginning to get nervous, and presses God for assurance that He will do as He has said.

It is in this context of Abram's uncertainty that God makes a contract with him. This is a vivid illustration of the fact that the whole point of a contract, *any* contract, is to guarantee behavior. Given the span of time covered by the contract—especially given the later clarification in Genesis 17:7-8—the contract implicitly asserts God's sovereign control. Where the Noahic contract showed God's sovereign control of the world of nature, this contract shows God's sovereign control over all of geopolitical history.

## The Red Sea Crossing

We don't really have time to spend on this passage except just to note that it's here. In Exodus 14, God brings Israel across the Red Sea. In chapter 15, Israel spontaneously pours out praise to the Lord for delivering them from the armies of Egypt. We will look at songs of praise in more detail in the next session, but note that this celebration establishes the precedent for a lot of what happens later with David.

## The Law, Part 1: Sinai

### **The Giving of the Law (Exodus 19-20)**

As God prepares Israel to hear the Law, He first has Moses charge the people with obeying all His Law—which, let us not forget, they haven't heard yet—and they agree. Then God warns them to purify themselves, and not to touch the mountain, because it is holy. On the appointed day, God descends to the top of the mountain. When Moses ascends the mountain to speak with God, the first thing God does is send him back down the mountain to warn them again not to touch the mountain. Then God speaks to Israel, audibly, from the mountain. Although God is speaking to Moses, who will speak to Israel, the people can hear God's voice as He gives the ten commandments from the mountain (compare Deuteronomy 5:45-, 24-26).

As we thought about contracts, now we need to think about law. In order for law to work *at all*, the law has to refer to something in the real world, people have to know about it, and they must understand exactly what the law means practically. All these things are exemplified wonderfully in the Law. The people all hear the voice of God Himself declaring the law. The law is clear enough; “don't work on the Sabbath” and “don't steal” are not particularly murky concepts.

### **An Example**

In Numbers 15:32-36, they caught a man gathering sticks for firewood on the Sabbath day. Clearly this is work, and at God's instruction, they executed him. At risk of belaboring the point, the verbal communication from God had a clear referent in the real world, and when someone's behavior violated the law, the people recognized it and acted accordingly.

## The Law, Part 2: Deuteronomy

In the book of Deuteronomy, Israel is poised to enter the land of Canaan under Joshua's leadership and conquer the land. Moses' last act before he dies is to instruct this generation of Israel in the Law of God. Most of the book is taken up with this task. Since it largely repeats the earlier Law, we won't go into it here. However, we want to focus on the closing instructions.

### **Initial Propagation (Deuteronomy 27:1-26)**

Moses gives Israel two initial tasks to do when they have crossed into the land. The first is to raise standing stones on which they will carve the law of God. This makes the Law publicly accessible for anyone who cares to read it. Second, Moses divides the nation by tribes and instructs them to stand on opposing mountains, while the Levites read out the curses associated with breaking the Law,

and the people cry out “Amen!” to each curse. No one in Israel would be able to say that he was unaware of the Law.

### **Specific Consequences (Deuteronomy 28:1-30:10)**

Chapter 28 gives highly specific blessings for obedience to the Law, and even more specific curses for disobedience. Chapter 29 gives a historical review of all that God has done for Israel, culminating with a curse/prophecy of what the Lord will do when they disobey. In 30:1-10, God explains the blessings of the restoration when Israel has been disciplined and has turned her heart to the Lord again.

### **Accessibility of the Law (Deuteronomy 30:11-20)**

Finally, Moses closes the instruction with an exhortation that none of this Law is too hard to understand, but it is “near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.” The choice before them is not some complex moral dilemma; rather, it is very simple. Obey and live or rebel and die. All they need to do is choose correctly. And so that the choice remains simple, they are to read the Law publicly every seven years (31:9-13)

## **3. THIS WEEK’S CHALLENGES**

### *Your Daily Walk*

As you go about your week, meditate on the following key points:

- God’s promises are understandable and stable. Best of all, He keeps them!
- God’s Law is verbal, propositional revelation.
- God’s Law—His requirements for a life pleasing to Him—is understandable and attainable.

When an Israelite was in doubt as to what God’s Law said, he could go to the standing stones and read the Law for himself. When you are in doubt about what God’s Word says about a difficult situation in your life, what do you do?

### *Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)*

This week, as you study the psalm, continue to note your observations. In addition, develop questions about the psalm. It was written roughly 3000 years ago, in a preindustrial, agricultural society, in a different language. What gaps are there between you and the original audience, and how might these gaps of language, culture, history, etc. influence the way in which they read the psalm? Note the gaps, and ask questions about the differences between the original audience and yourself.

### *Reading (1-2 hrs.)*

Read chapters 8-18 of Howard Hendricks’ *Living by the Book*. If you read Hendricks first, it will help your work in Psalm 139.

### *Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)*

This week we looked at God’s promises to Abraham. God also commanded Abram that he would be a blessing. Trace the theme of blessing and cursing through

Genesis 12-50. Keep in mind that you're not only looking for those words, but those concepts. When were Abraham and his family a blessing, and to whom? When were they a curse, and to whom? Does this give some coherence to the overall account as we have it in Genesis 12?

### For Further Study

Think back over last week's *Enuma Elish* assignment. For just a moment, assume for the sake of argument that *Enuma Elish* is the true creation story. On that basis, could any of the gods credibly make the promises Yahweh made to Noah? Could any of them be counted on to keep promises like those made to Abraham, even if they wanted to? Why or why not?

## 4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES

### Your Daily Walk

What trial or perplexing situation did you encounter last week in which you asked yourself, "What does God have to say about this?"

Did you have an answer, or know how to find one?

### Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

What things did you observe in Psalm 139?

### Reading (1-2 hrs.)

What did you learn from your reading?

What did you think of the introduction to the subject in the first four chapters? Was it new material to you, or have you heard this before?

Were you surprised by the amount of information Hendricks was able to pull out of just one verse in chapter 6? Do you think you could do the same?

### Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

I asked you to read the text of *Enuma Elish*, a pagan creation epic, and notice similarities and differences between it and the Genesis account. I also asked you to think about the possible implications of those differences. To set the stage, remember that *Enuma Elish* is older than Genesis; it and other stories like it were part of the backdrop against which Moses wrote. However, we also have to remember that although *Enuma Elish* was written down before Genesis, the events of Genesis happened first. When Noah and his family got off the boat, they all knew who Yahweh was and what He had done. In the next few generations, however, it seems that many people abandoned the truth and rebelled against Yahweh. Pagan creation epics would be a necessary result of that rebellion, a propaganda tool to justify their pagan conduct. With that in kind, let's look at some specific details.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For those present in person at this session, we provided a handout with the following excerpts from *Enuma Elish*: I.1-40, IV.91-110, 131-146, V.45-66, VI.1-40. Copyright restrictions do not permit us unlimited distribution; however, you may look it up in a reference work or find it online at <http://www.crivoice.org/enumaelish.html>.

1. Who are the primeval beings, the very first? How many are they, and what is their nature?
2. How do the gods come into existence?
3. How does the world come into existence?
4. How does humanity come into existence?
5. Where does sin first come into the account?

In summary, in *Enuma Elish* the ground of all being is primeval chaos. Chaos gives birth to the forces of order, but order only arises out of chaos by struggle and murderous force of will, and the very chaos that gives birth to order always threatens its existence. The generating powers are chaos, sex and death. So tell me: what did Charles Darwin really contribute to human thought that the rebels on the plains of Shinar hadn't already figured out millennia before? Darwin gives us random mutation and natural selection as generative mechanisms, but this is just another way of saying "chaos, sex and death" without being laughed at in a "scientific" society.

Contrast that to the biblical view, in which conflict is not a normal part of the world-order. Man has a high calling to rule and cultivate the earth, but he rebels against God, thus introducing sin and death into the whole of creation. Chaos and death are not normal and necessary to creation, but abnormal and destructive (and will ultimately be quarantined in the lake of fire). Sex is not an eternal creative force as it is in pagan thought; it is *created* by God. God does not create by means of sexual reproduction; there is a firm distinction of kind between creature and Creator.