

Chapter 6

CHARACTER OF GOD 1 INTRODUCTION OF GOD'S COVENANTS

- I. As we begin to read and study the Bible, the word "covenant" becomes very prominent. The Bible is even divided into two main sections, the Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant). What does the word covenant mean?
 - A. A covenant is a contract or agreement between two parties made binding by an oath. When a covenant is made, there is always responsibility on both parties that are participating in the covenant.
 - B. In this lesson on covenants we will be primarily concentrating on the covenants that are made between God and man. When we enter into covenant with God, we must realize that the covenant is initiated by God, the terms are set by God, and the promises are fulfilled by God. God is the key and it begins with Him because He is a covenant God.
- II. God is a covenant-making and a covenant-keeping God
 - A. God makes covenants; that is His nature. God desires to be in covenant relationship with man. That has always been His plan. We see this in scripture with the "If's and then's" and "I will, if you will" promises of God. Making covenant with man is God's way. He says, "I'm here and I'm available to you." (Psalms 37:3-6)
 - B. Above all God is a covenant-keeping God. When God makes a commitment we can be sure that He will follow it through and fulfill His responsibility in the covenant that He has made with us. (1 Chronicles 16:15-18)
- III. What does God say about covenants that are made with Him?
 - A. God will not break a covenant He has made. If the covenant is nullified it is because we fail to fulfill our responsibility in the covenant. God remembers the covenants that He makes and will fulfill His part if and as we fulfill our part. (Exodus 6:1-8; Judges 2:1; Jeremiah 33:19-21)

<p><i>Obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Only do as I say, and all will be well! Jeremiah 7:23 New Living Translation</i></p>

- B. God will follow through on His promises of judgment when there is disobedience on our part.
 - 1. See Jeremiah 11:1-17 for an account of God's judgment on the people of Judah and Jerusalem when they broke the terms of the covenant that had been made

with God.

2. God's mercy will always triumph over His judgment because the continuing relationship He is establishing is important to Him. When we are slow to respond in obedience, God's mercy will triumph over His judgment. *"Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!" (James 2:13)*

C. When Israel failed to fulfill the requirements of the covenant that God made with them as He brought them out of Egypt, God in His mercy gave them the promise of a new covenant that He would write on their hearts and minds. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

1. The Old Covenant was motivated by fear of loss and punishment and was very external in nature.
2. The New Covenant is motivated by grace and love and is worked internally in our hearts and minds.

IV. What is it that God expects from us as our responsibility in a covenant with Him?

A. God wants simple obedience to the terms of the covenants He makes with us. His desire in making covenant with us is to have relationship with us as His people. Our obedience to the terms of the covenant allows the relationship with Him to prosper. (Psalm 40:6; Hosea 6:6-7)

Under Old Testament law when it was time to set a slave free if the slave chose to stay with his master because of love for him and his house, the master was to take an awl and push it through the slave's ear lobe. The slave would then become his servant for life. This can be a picture for us of the type of commitment to God that He desires from us. (Exodus 21:2-6; Deuteronomy 21:12-17)

B. In Adam we see God's first covenant made with man and the simple terms of that covenant. God first said to Adam *"...be fruitful and multiply; fill and subdue the earth."* God then commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God gave Adam a simple instruction with one requirement which was simple obedience. His disobedience to this simple instruction brought about the fall of man. (Genesis 1:28-31; Genesis 2:15-17)

C. When God sees repentance from the people, He will renew the covenant that He has made with them because continuing in the relationship with them is important to Him.

1. Nehemiah reminded God of the covenant He had made with the people of Israel and of the promise He had made to them that they would return to Him and His ways. (Nehemiah 1:1-11)
 - a. Nehemiah 8: As Ezra read from the Book of the law the people listened to and then responded to the commandments of the Lord that were written there.

- b. Nehemiah 9: The people of Israel confessed their sins to God and then repented from them.
 - c. Nehemiah 10: The people of Israel ratified or put their seal on the covenant and listed the responsibilities of their part of the covenant.
 - 2. As the people were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, there was also the renewing of their covenant with God. Many times we need to rebuild areas in our own lives and by doing that renew our covenant with God.
- D. What are some areas of difficulty we have with the covenants we make with God?
- 1. God makes covenant with us and we break the covenant through disobedience.
 - 2. God remembers the covenants He makes. We forget the promises we make to God.
 - 3. God never fails in fulfilling His responsibilities in the covenants He makes. We often fail to follow through on our responsibilities.
 - 4. We need to always remember that God is a God of mercy and redemption. He offers us hope in our disobedience with the renewal of His covenants with us as we repent and begin to rebuild in faith.

V. Additional Scriptures:

Psalm 32:10; Psalm 33:4,11,18; Psalm 89:1; Psalm 105:8-11; Psalm 106:44-45; Psalm 111:5; Psalm 117:2; Psalm 119:90; Psalm 145:13; Psalm 147:11; II Chronicles 6:14; Nehemiah 1:5

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 6 Character of God 1 - Introduction to God's Covenants

- 1. Think about some of the characteristics that you know about God and His nature and then consider how those characteristics make him a covenant God.
- 2. What are some walls in your personal life that might need to be rebuilt just as Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem?