



Newcastle City Temple Connected

Reimagining Church Together

Dear friends

As I look out on my garden this morning, signs of new life can be seen as the bulbs continue to push up through the hardened - frost crusted soil, a helpful reminder during these long days of winter that springtime is on its way.

Whilst the shortest day of the year was actually December the 21st, each day the days have been getting longer by an average of 2 mins and 7 seconds, which means that by Monday (18th January) we shall be enjoying an extra hours daylight; and every four weeks thereafter, an hour or so of sunshine should lighten up the day, each day becoming a little brighter than the one before - until the summer solstice on June 21st.

As type these words the old songster piece 'Let a little sunshine in your heart' comes to mind;
<https://youtu.be/TnM-V9Q4pvU>

How anyone can listen to this song without smiling I don't know.

'When the voice of God is calling you from darkness into light,
But you fail to find a way to make a start
Do not struggle on regardless through a life of endless night,
Why not let a little sunshine in your heart?



*Let a little sunshine in your heart, let a little sunshine in your heart,
Feel the love of God shine down upon your smiling face,
Let a little sunshine in your heart'.*

Further hope has of course been realised this past week—as the mass roll out of the vaccination against Covid-19 continues, and more than 3.2 million have had the vaccination (double the rate of last week). Whilst there is still a long way to go—members of this corps have spoken of an overwhelming sense of joy at having received the first vaccination. No doubt many of us have seen the emotional scenes on television, people smiling from ear to hear— a hope filled happiness, and a belief that freedom from this terrible virus will one day be realised. I can barely wait—Can you?

Until then - I pray that we will each keep safe, well and strong in faith

With every blessing
Major Liz

Clarence Adoo has selected two Band Pieces for this week

'Time to be holy' (Paul Sharman) SASB 790
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=mwj1tt9dXO8>

*Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in him always, and feed on his Word;
Make friends of God's children; help those who are weak;
Forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.*

'The Present Age' (Leslie Condon) SASB 946
https://youtu.be/VI4_74jR2Js
Played by Bristol Eastern Band under the leadership of BM Don Jenkins.

Clarence is appreciative of all the prayers, and makes his thanks known to you.

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Reimagining Church Together - Announcements

Vision and Commitment 2021

A reminder that the theme this year is *'Going Forward Together Living in God's Covenant'* - Last week we looked at Jeremiah 31:31-34 and considered God's Invitation; today we are encouraged to turn to Genesis 12:1-3 and Exodus 19:1-8 and consider Covenant: God's Promise and God's Choice. Some of you (those who receive the weekly periodicals and those who receive a printed copy of this bulletin), should have received your commitment cards—I hope to distribute the rest this week.

Weekly activities & dates for your diary

Virtual Coffee Morning

Each Tuesday at 11am on Zoom

<https://zoom.us/j/94036559399?pwd=S3lCVFU1QklkcWVsQnJrRUpWNDlNdz09>

Meeting ID: 940 3655 9399

Passcode: 236837

LYFE House Groups

Heathers group will be meeting at 7pm on Thursday (21st Jan) material will be delivered early this week.

LENT Bible Study Series

Launching the 21st Jan (Heather's House Group), 26th & 28th Jan (Major Liz's & BM Bob's House Group).

Is a 5 part Lent Study Series entitled 'From the Ram to the Lamb'. For those who are not currently part of a House Group, but who would like to join a house group for this study - please contact Major Liz Hancock as soon as possible. Alternatively if there are those who would like to follow the series on their own as part of your personal lent devotions - then please let me know so that I can let you have copies of the material.

Monday 25th January - Corps Council via Zoom at 7pm

Access codes to the meeting will be sent to members of the Corps Council this week.

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

SUNDAY: 17th January 2021

Theme: Covenant: God's Promise and God's Choice

Key Text: Genesis 12:1-3 and Exodus 19:1-8

Covenants are an important feature of the Bible's teaching. Seven specific covenants are revealed in Scripture. These seven covenants fall into three categories—conditional, unconditional, and general. Conditional covenants are based on certain obligations and prerequisites; if the requirements are not fulfilled, the covenant is broken. Unconditional covenants are made with no strings attached and will be kept regardless of one party's fidelity or infidelity. General covenants are not specific to one people group and can involve a wide range of people.

The **conditional covenant** mentioned in Scripture is the **Mosaic Covenant**; the blessings it extends are contingent upon Israel's adherence to the Law. The **unconditional covenants** mentioned in the Bible are the **Abrahamic, Palestinian, and Davidic Covenants**; God promises to fulfil these regardless of other factors. The **general covenants** mentioned are the **Adamic, Noahic, and New Covenants**, which are global in scope.

Over the page you will find a brief explanation of each of these covenants, with supporting scriptural references, which you might find helpful in your own personal reflection on this whole subject of Covenants, which we are being encouraged to explore together at the start of this year.

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- 1. Adamic Covenant. (Genesis 1:26-30 and 2:16-17) *this covenant is general in nature.*** It included the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, pronounced a curse for sin, and spoke of a future provision for man's redemption (**Genesis 3:15**).
- 2. Noahic Covenant.** This *general covenant* was made between God and Noah following the departure of Noah, his family, and the animals from the ark. Found in **Genesis 9:8-17**, "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" (v11). This covenant included a sign of God's faithfulness to keep it—the rainbow.
- 3. Abrahamic Covenant.** This *unconditional covenant*, first made to Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3**, promised God's blessing upon Abraham, to make his name great and to make his progeny into a great nation. The covenant also promised blessing to those who blessed Abraham and cursing to those who cursed him. Further, God vowed to bless the entire world through Abraham's seed. Circumcision was the sign that Abraham believed the covenant (**Romans 4:11**). The fulfillment of this covenant is seen in the history of Abraham's descendants and in the creation of the nation of Israel. The worldwide blessing came through Jesus Christ, who was of Abraham's family line.
- 4. Palestinian Covenant.** This *unconditional covenant*, found in **Deuteronomy 30:1-10**, noted God's promise to scatter Israel if they disobeyed God, then to restore them at a later time to their land. This covenant has been fulfilled twice, with the Babylonian Captivity and subsequent rebuilding of Jerusalem under Cyrus the Great; and with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, followed by the reinstatement of the nation of Israel in 1948.
- 5. Mosaic Covenant.** This *conditional covenant*, found in **Deuteronomy 11** and elsewhere, promised the Israelites a blessing for obedience and a curse for disobedience. Much of the Old Testament chronicles the fulfillment of this cycle of judgment for sin and later blessing when God's people repented and returned to God.
- 6. Davidic Covenant.** This *unconditional covenant*, found in **2 Samuel 7:8-16; 23:5**, promised to bless David's family line and assured an everlasting kingdom. Jesus is from the family line of David (**Luke 1:32-33**) and, as the Son of David (**Mark 10:47**), is the fulfillment of this covenant.
- 7. New Covenant.** This covenant, found in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, promised that God would forgive sin and have a close, unbroken relationship with His people. The promise was first made to Israel and then extended to everyone who comes to Jesus Christ in faith (**Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15**).

Source: [What are the different covenants in the Bible? \(compellingtruth.org\)](http://compellingtruth.org)

The Mosaic Covenant is God's definitive Covenant with Israel; established through Moses (Exodus 19:1-8), in the giving of the ten commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and the setting up of the Ark of the Covenant with its Tabernacle (Exodus 25:1 to 26:37).

This covenant was well summed up by the prophet Jeremiah whereby God said "I will be your God and you shall be my people (Jeremiah 7:23).

Through Abraham God had made both a personal and universal promise to bless all mankind through his descendants - and we can see how God's covenants with both Abraham and Moses reflect both his promise to humankind and his commitment to us.

Suggested Song: From every stormy wind that blows (SASB 753)

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The Mosaic Covenant

There are three key ideas which emerge through God's Covenant with Israel through Moses:

1. God's Initiative and his Eagles' Wings

God asks Moses to remind the people who have been rescued from Egypt, *'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself'* (v4). This image of being carried to God on eagles' wings is both compelling and reassuring, as Isaiah rightly reminds us – *'...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint'* (Isaiah 40:31). It also underlines the initiative that God takes in choosing us first.

There can be a danger in confusing the word 'Contract' with 'Covenant' or at least using the two words interchangeably; you see there is a significant difference between the idea of a 'contract' and a 'covenant'. A contract may be broken and dissolved, and of course humankind proves unfaithful in its covenant with God. Yet God's covenant commitment is everlasting, and he cannot forsake his faithfulness, just as Paul in 2 Timothy 2:13 reminds us;

'if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself'.

In the Hebrew language we find the word *Hesed*; *It is a word which can be translated as loving-kindness, steadfast love, loyal love, unending love*; It's a word which speaks of the Covenant Love of God, his faithful commitment to us, and as such it is the closest thing in the Old Testament to the New Testament understanding of grace; something which Isaiah clearly captures when he writes: *"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unending love (hesed) for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you'* (Isaiah 54:10). This reassurance is spoken to an unfaithful Israel, in exile; and maybe it is a word which you and I need to hear today - especially in the current climate.

2. God's Commandments and our obedience

While God's covenant is everlasting and faithful, it is designed to be a relationship in which we as God's people declare our love and humble obedience to our King, and in him find our life and fullness. God says to Moses, *'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession'* (v5).

God's covenant with Israel through Moses is accompanied by the giving of the Ten Commandments which are to define the character and the conduct of God's people, enabling them to be different from all other peoples and nations of the world. Historical study shows just how radically different these expectations were from any other known religion or polytheism in the surrounding nations, in worshipping one living God with no other idols or gods. One God, Our King!

Suggested Song: Purify my Heart (SASB 517)

3. God's Holy Covenant of Love

The final idea to emerge from Exodus 19:1-8 is God's Holy Covenant of Love.

Ultimately the people of God in covenant with him were being called to grow into the very character of the God who chose and called them; in other words to be set apart for him and be made holy. God said to Moses, *'Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'* (v5 & 6). And in this, God's people are called to bear witness to Him.

When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (the Septuagint), the Hebrew word for covenant was translated as 'testament', or as the dictionary defines it 'the evidence of a specified fact'. The covenant people of God are called to bear witness to their King, in word and deed.

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A 'kingdom of priests' mediates or at least signifies God to the world, and so bears witness to who God is and what God expects. Equally a 'holy nation' is a people set apart, who as such give clear testimony to the nature and character of God.

When we sing words such as...

*Refiners fire,
My heart's one desire is to be holy.
Set apart for you, Lord,
I choose to be holy,
Set apart for you, my Master,
Ready to do your will*

<https://youtu.be/aSlazjrA0Ls>

We indicate with our voices - the desire which ought to be on the heart of every Christian who desires to have this covenantal relationship with God; in response to his unfailing love and faithfulness—it ought to be our desire to bear witness to him - with all that we are and all that we have.

We serve a Holy God who is generous in love. In our focus on holiness, it's easy to get stuck on what we don't do (the negative aspect of holiness) rather than what we actually do (the positive aspect of holiness)! If God's covenant love, hesed, speaks of constant, unfailing love and forgiveness, then the character of our holiness in the world is to be known fully for our actively generous, sacrificial, merciful and unfailing love, as the people of this holy King. That is what we do, and this is who we are called to be.

In Conclusion;

While the Israelites' journey as a covenanted people reveals disobedience and seasons of questioning their destiny, God keeps his covenant. He is faithful, just and merciful no matter how the people behave. God is unchanging, and our responsibility to obey him does not change despite our failures.

*¹The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ²"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
⁴So Abram went, as the Lord had told him;*

When Abraham faithfully and courageously set out on his journey with God, and believed the promises of God for his life, his family, his descendants and his future (Genesis 12:1-3), it was with a very dim and rather smoky view of what this meant.

In contrast, in God's covenant with Israel through Moses we see a much fuller flowering of God's character and intent, something which would be ultimately superseded and fulfilled hundreds of years later in the hopes of the prophets and the reality of Jesus - and we will pick up on this NEXT WEEK!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as I read through your word and see the wonderful plan of salvation which you purposed to carry out through your chosen people, Israel, I thank you that despite their disobeying the conditions of your covenant, you never gave up on your people, and used them to be your witnesses – through whom was born the Messiah, who became the sin-offering for the world.

Thank you that today you are carrying out your plans and purposes through the Body of Christ, which is the Church, and thank you that by faith in him I am also your precious possession – through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you that the day is coming when you will ratify your New Covenant with the house of Judah and the house of Israel and that Christ will return to set up his Kingdom on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. We praise your holy name, for Jesus' name's sake. Amen.

<https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Exodus/19/5>