

I SWEAR TEACHING

COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP

Our lives are about relationships. Within every moment of our lives, we are in relationship with the people around us. Each one of these relationships carries responsibilities for all parties in order for the relationship to last. A child should follow his parent's rules and a parent ought to provide for the needs of their child. If one of these responsibilities is neglected, the relationship suffers.

When God created man and woman, He established a relationship. Adam and Eve were created to love and enjoy the love of God. In His love, God gave them the option to reject Him. Adam and Eve had to have had a choice or else they wouldn't be giving God true love—they would be robots. They were not forced to be in love. The serpent tricked the man and woman, and they chose to disobey God. In their action, they decided that they knew better than God. They believed the serpent: God was hiding something from them and that they could have it if they chose to disobey His commandment.

In this action, Adam and Eve lost the joy of an innocent relationship with the Father. Consequently, humanity inherited this disconnected relationship from their first parents. If the world continued this way, God's plan would have ultimately failed. This is why God chose to redeem man so the relationship could be restored. The steps taken to achieve this relationship are seen in God's covenants with man.

FROM ADAM AND EVE TO COVENANT WITH NOAH

God began to renew His covenantal relationship with creation with Noah. Since the original sin of our first parents, "human wickedness was great on earth and that human hearts contrived nothing but wicked schemes all day long." God was upset with what humans had become. The Lord decided that He would destroy his creation because of its wickedness—animal and man—because of the regret He felt. However, one man found favor with God, his name was Noah.

God told Noah that He would destroy the wicked men and all of creation with a flood. Noah, a just man, was given instructions from God to build an ark and to gather two of every animal aboard to be spared. God would flood the world, destroying all but those in the ark, including Noah's family. God said to Noah that He would, "establish [his] covenant and you [Noah] will go aboard the ark, yourself, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives along with you."

For 40 days and 40 nights, the rain came and flooded the earth and all life was destroyed. After 40 days, the Lord promised never to destroy His creation again, provided that His creation promised something in return. This is called a covenant, an agreement between God and man, instituted by God, contingent upon particular conditions.

In the covenant with Noah, God blesses Noah and his sons and tells them to repopulate the world, allows man to eat either meat or vegetables (previously it was just vegetables), forbids eating meat that still contains blood, forbids murder but if someone is murdered the murderer's life is to be accounted for by men. For all this, God promises to never destroy the life on Earth.

These conditions apply to the entire human race. These are essential truths for our human condition and have lasted even until today. We do not typically eat blood and murdering innocent life is believed to be an intrinsically wrong action. These are things revealed to Noah and the generations that came after.

Genesis 6:5
Genesis 6:8

Genesis 6:9-22
Genesis 6:18

Genesis 9:1-6

Genesis 22:1-24

ABRAHAM

Abraham is the father of our faith. Divine revelation officially begins with His covenant with God, because from this covenant God establishes a people set aside for Himself. God at this point becomes a personal God again.

In every covenant and in every relationship between God and humans, God asks our obedience so that He may bless us. In the story of Abraham, God made several successive covenants with Abraham, which tested and conditioned his faith.

Genesis 12:2

Abraham was originally named Abram, and had no children. God called Abram to leave his homeland and travel to a place called Canaan, which God had chosen for Abram and his family to live. God promised Abram that he would make his descendants into a great nation. Even though Abram did not have any descendants at the time, he trusted the Lord, gathered his belongings, and went with his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, to travel to Canaan. Along the way, Abram was tested by the Lord in a variety of ways. Abram proved his faith even though the Lord had not blessed Abram with a great nation of descendants—the Lord had not so much as blessed Abram with a single child!

Genesis 15:2

After rescuing his nephew from an enemy's army, Abram was offered a reward but turned it down because he wanted to show that he was not working for gold or silver. That night, the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

Genesis 22:12

God's promises Abram that he would be the father of a great nation and changes his name to Abraham. Even though Abraham and his wife were unable to have a child, with God's grace and because of Abraham's obedience, Abraham's wife Sarah became pregnant with their only son, Isaac. Later, the Lord asks Abraham to sacrifice his son for Him.

Abraham and Isaac set out to the mountainside to which the Lord directed them so that he could sacrifice his son. Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice. Just as Abraham was ready to slaughter Isaac, an angel appeared and the voice of the Lord spoke out through his angel saying, "Do not raise your hand against the boy...Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your own beloved son."

The "sign" of the covenant with Abraham would be that every male would be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. God promised to give Abraham's descendants the land between Egypt and the Euphrates river (today known as Israel, Jordan, and Iraq) and to make him the father of many nations.

Genesis 22:16-18

"I swear by my own self...that because you have done this, because you have not refused me your own beloved son, I will shower blessings on you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants will gain possession of the gates of their enemies. All nations on earth will bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed my command."

All this for simply obeying the Lord.

Exodus 19-20

MOSES AND SINAI

Moses led the Israelite people out of slavery in Egypt and through the desert. At this stage of the journey, God had already blessed the Israelites through the Passover and by parting the Red Sea. Moses led the Israelites to the Mountain of God (Sinai). Once there, God revealed Himself to Moses, God's chosen prophet among the Israelites.

At this mountain, God bestows the Ten Commandments upon the Israelites. These

Ten Commandments are the basis of human morality. They are not purely religious ordinances; they are the basis of the natural laws of life. Don't take innocent life, don't take what is rightfully someone else's, marriage is sacred and is not to be defiled, etc.—these are true in every situation! In following the Commandments, the Lord promises to make Israel His people—a chosen people whom the Lord has elected to reveal Himself. The Lord also promised that there would be a designated priesthood. In this time period, most people weren't able to freely communicate with God. Prayers were heard, but it was the priests who were able to offer sacrifices, bless the people on behalf of the Lord and participate in temple worship. These men were similar to the priests that we have today in our Church and were as necessary for the Israelites then as our clergy is for us today. The Lord also promised to give His people the Sabbath day as a gift and a permanent sign of his covenant.

What? Yes, the Sabbath day is not just the free time you enjoy at the end of the week. It is a gift from God. It is a day in which we cease from our labors as God did from his on the seventh day of creation. It is our time to enjoy all of what our Lord has done for us and to honor Him in a special way that is different from the rest of our week. God designed it for us. When our Sundays are saturated with unnecessary toil, we fall short of honoring God on the Sabbath. When we spend more time at the mall than with our families, when we save all our homework until Sunday night, or when we miss Mass, we aren't showing the Lord that we appreciate His gift. We also miss the point of the Sabbath. The whole idea of the covenantal gift of the Sabbath is that we rest. The Sabbath should be an opportunity to let go of all of those things, give thanks to God and focus on the things of heaven.

DAVID AS KING: GOD'S COVENANT WITH HOUSE OF DAVID

Saul, who started out as a great king for the Jews, lost the Lord's favor because of his disobedience. God's prophet, Samuel, went to find the one whom the Lord had chosen to replace Saul. Finding a man named Jesse in Bethlehem, the Lord reveals that one of his sons will be the king. Samuel finds Jesse's youngest son, David, tending sheep. Samuel recognizes that he is the one whom the Lord has anointed to be a king.

David was a young man and worked in the service of King Saul. He was a warrior and talented in music. As Saul's armies marched into battle against their enemies, David was very successful and popular—more so than even the king! After Saul's death, "all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, 'Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the LORD said to you, "You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel.'" So all the elders of Israel...anointed David king over Israel."

King David conquered the enemies inhabiting the land promised to the Israelites. He captured the holy mountain and city of Jerusalem and in celebration and thanksgiving to the Lord, he wanted to build a house for the Ark of the Covenant (the container that held the Ten Commandments from the covenant with Moses) in the city of Jerusalem—David wished to build God a holy temple. The Lord's prophet, Nathan, came to David and told him that he was not to do so. That a temple would be built later on to house the Ark.

The Lord spoke to King David saying, "When your days are complete...I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, 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 a father to him and he will be a son to Me;...My loving kindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."

The Lord promised to send a descendant of David to create a dwelling place for the Lord, a "son" of God, another king. This was the Lord's covenant to David, that one of

2 Samuel 1-18

2 Samuel 7:12-16

Psalm 89:3-4

his descendants would be God's chosen one to establish the Kingdom of God. This covenant was honored by God unconditionally. Despite the eventual disobedience on the part of the Israelites, the Lord did not forget His promise to David. He tells us, "I have sworn to David My servant, I will establish your seed forever and build up your throne to all generations."

Acts 2:30-32

In our Christian faith, we regard David's importance as a precursor to Christ. We hear of this in the Acts of the Apostles: "But since he [David] was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn him an oath to make one of his descendants succeed him on the throne, he [God] spoke with foreknowledge about the resurrection of the Christ...God raised this man Jesus." Christ is the fulfillment of the covenant with David. He is the hope of His people and the King of heaven and earth.

GOD'S COVENANTS IN OUR LIVES

We see and hear of how the Israelites were given chances to know the Father in a more complete way through their covenants, but what do we have today as Christians?

At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Eucharist, His Body and His Blood offered in an unbloody re-presentation of the sacrifice that was to take place on the cross. He calls this the *New Covenant*. This is the sign of the ultimate restoration of the relationship between God and man—the complete sign of our salvation. In this event, Jesus makes himself an offering for the sake of humanity and establishes a covenant between man and God on our behalf.

The way to find God's love and to rest in His providence is in the person of Jesus Christ. The covenant of the Eucharist is a reminder of that.