

ESV **Exodus 19:1** On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.

² They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain,

³ while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel:

⁴ You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey (hear/shama) my voice and keep (guard/shamar) my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

⁷ So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.

⁸ All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear (shama) when I speak with you, and may also believe (Gen 15:6, 'aman) you forever." When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD,

¹⁰ the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments

¹¹ and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

¹² And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.

¹³ No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to [on] the mountain." EX 3:12

¹⁴ So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments.

¹⁵ And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

¹⁶ On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

¹⁷ Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

¹⁹ And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

²⁰ The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

²¹ And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish.

²² Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them."

²³ And Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.'"

²⁴ And the LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them."

²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and told them.
(Exo 19:1-25 ESV)

¹⁹ I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules,

²⁰ and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.

²¹ But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness.

²² But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out.

²³ Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries,

²⁴ because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols.

²⁵ Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life,
(Eze 20:19-25 ESV)

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Gen 3:8 ESV)

because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." (Gen 26:5 ESV)

"They will pay heed to what you say; (Exo 3:18 NAU)

Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? (Exo 5:2 NAU)

"If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer." (Exo 15:26 NAU)

**To Hear of Not to Hear:
*Two Covenants at Sinai***

Exodus 19

Today we will return to Exodus, after several months off. We last saw Moses overwhelmed by the people's problems and Jethro, his father-in-law, giving him advice on setting up a judicial system that would allow Moses to concentrate on other concerns. Like the stories of Melchizedek and Cyrus, the Jethro narrative serves as a model of the godly Gentile right before God makes a covenantal promise to the people. But it also serves, in the same way that Melchizedek and Cyrus serve, as a Gentile precursor to the giving of the covenant to the people of God. And so we come today to the foot of Mt. Sinai.

“On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain” (Ex 19:1-2). What takes place now is one of the most important stories in all the Bible. And yet, it is also a story greatly misunderstood, especially in its application to the people of God in our own day. In order to make sense of the details, you need the proper biblical categories, like building a house before you begin to put your stuff in it. The details of the passage here are the “stuff.” The categories are the “rooms” of the house.

Our house has three rooms, but we will only look at two today. We will call our two rooms “covenant 1” and “covenant 2” (the third room is actually a third covenant which takes place prior to the other two). What we are being prepped for in Exodus 19 is the great covenant that God makes with Israel at Mt. Sinai, the terms of which are identified as the Ten Commandments. And yet, we need two categories in our minds if we have any hope at all of understanding what God is doing with Israel here, and how that matters to us Christians some 3,000+ years removed from them.

First, what is a covenant? Covenants are formal relationships that God sets up with men. In the ancient world, the high king (suzerain) would make a covenant with the lesser king (the vassal). There were two types of ancient covenants. You have **Suzerain treaties** and **covenants of grant**. The former covenants offer reward conditioned upon obedience. The latter are gifts of the high king to the lower king. An example of a covenant grant can be found at Ugarit, “From this day forward Niqmaddu son of Ammistamru king of Ugarit has taken the house of Pabeya which is in Ullami, and given it to Nuriyana and to his descendants forever. Let no one take it from the hand of Nuriyana or his descendants forever. Seal of the king.”

The bible follows this same pattern of covenant making. Let me tell you about its two main historical covenants. Covenant 1 can be referred to as the [covenant of creation](#) or the [covenant of works](#). Covenant 2 is usually called the [covenant of grace](#). Works vs. grace follows the pattern of conditions vs. grants. Works are based upon obedience and conditions. Grants are based only upon the goodwill of the covenant giver. If you are insightful, you will notice that these two basic kinds of Biblical covenants follow the two “words” of Scripture: law and gospel. It is absolutely critical that you come to understand this, because the entire Christian religion hangs upon what you do with these two covenantal ideas. Let me flesh this out historically, before we come to Exodus 19.

The Covenant of Works

The original state of mankind was one of innocent uprightness in the Garden of Eden. God created [Adam](#) in his image, and entered into a relationship with him. This relationship took a legal form: [Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day you eat of it, you will surely die \(Gen 2:17\)](#). There was obviously a lot more to it than this, but the negative command here shows that God put Adam under law. He was under a legal obligation to obey the commandment.

It is not possible to have a legal relationship with God apart from covenant, for covenants are the way that the legal relationship is enacted. Thus, the Bible refers to this pre-fall situation as a covenant. [Hosea 6:7](#) says, [“Like Adam they have transgressed the covenant.”](#) The only possible thing Hosea could be referring to is what Adam did in the Garden, when he ate the fruit. Hosea refers to Israel following the example of Adam. But since Adam is the father of all humanity, not just Israel, the Bible understands that all human beings follow in the same legal relationship with God as him. [Isaiah 24:5](#) says, [“The earth is polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant.”](#) The context makes it clear that the whole world is in view. The whole world breaks some covenant with God that includes laws and statutes.

This covenant is the covenant that God made at creation with our first parents. This covenant promised [reward for obedience](#) and [curse for disobedience](#). In other words, it was a suzerainty treaty. We have already seen the curse: if you break the command, you will surely die. But the reward for obedience is eternal life. [Gen 3:22](#) says that after Adam sinned, he had to be kicked out of the Garden, [“lest he reach out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”](#) So [Romans 2:7](#) puts it this way, [“To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life, but for those who are self-seeking, who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger, trouble and distress for every human being who does evil.”](#)

Here is the thing about the covenant of works. It is wholly and totally *fair*. In this way, it is not gracious at all. Fairness is the opposite of graciousness. God placed Adam under the covenant and based upon what Adam did, he would be rewarded or punished accordingly.

However, the critical piece is to understand that God did not remove this covenant once Adam sinned. The whole world, every human being born since, is born into this covenant and remains under its terms in a legally binding relationship with the Creator.

Evangelicals are fond of saying that they have a personal relationship with God. But the truth is, *everyone* has a personal relationship with God, not just Christians. Romans 1 says that we all “know” God. What Evangelicals (hopefully) mean is that they want to move from a relationship based upon wages and earnings and contracts and obligations (something like an employer/employee), to a familial relationship based upon blood and grace and family ties, something like father and child. I’ll get back to that shortly.

For now, consider why we are all under this covenant. The makeup of creation is such that it displays the glory of God so that men are without excuse. The moral order of the universe shows us all what is right and wrong, and God even places a conscience inside of us in order to convict us of sin and defend us when we do well. Finally, before Sinai and the giving of the law, people died. Death is the result of breaking the law. And in order to break the law of God, you have to be in covenant with him. Thus, there is no one who upon death will be able to say to God, “How come you are sending me to hell? I didn’t know about you. I didn’t know what you wanted.” Rather, God will say to those whom he sends to hell, “You are going here because you refused to obey what you knew I wanted you to do.” Thus, there is no such thing as God not being fair to people. Questions like “what about those who never hear the gospel, how can God send them to hell” are smoke and mirrors, deflecting the real issue that everyone sins knowingly and willingly against what they know God wants.

I bring the continuation of the covenant of works up not only so that you can see how fair God is, but so that you can gain a proper understanding of how covenant theology works biblically. The first thing you must remember is that this covenant of creation continues on in a straight line from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses to the Levites, to David, to Christ, to Peter, to Paul, to you and to me. That is, at one time or another, everyone of these people has been under obligation to keep the requirements of the covenant of works. It is our natural relationship with God. It makes us accountable and responsible before him. It makes everything that God does with us fair.

The second thing you need to remember is that the covenant of works is one way in which God has promised that a person can have eternal life. If you or anyone else obeys the terms of this covenant, God will grant to them eternal life. It is based strictly upon performance. God is fair. God is just. And God is good. What he promises, he will perform.

The third thing you need to remember is what the requirements of this covenant are. In Adam’s case, it was obedience to the commandment. There was no weighing of good works vs. bad works in Adam’s case. He would either obey God or he wouldn’t. There was no first place ribbon or even a consolation prize for 51% obedience here. He would either eat from the tree or he wouldn’t. In other words, **the requirement of this covenant is perfection**, not approximation

or sincerity. There was no second chance for Adam, a “do-over,” a mulligan, or a reboot. He would either obey and be rewarded or disobey and be punished.

This same requirement obtains as the covenant of works continues on into today. You either obey God or you don't. There is no room for partial obedience, selective obedience, sincere disobedience, or even ignorant disobedience. This is because the covenant reflects the very righteousness of God, and God is not a *sort-of* righteous being. If you want to earn eternal life, you must be morally matching with God. If you want to live with him forever in his temple, you must be exactly like him ethically. This is the first room, covenant 1, and I want you to tuck it away in your theological house.

The Covenant of Grace

Now we need to consider covenant 2, *the covenant of grace*. I gave you a list of people earlier, who you probably don't think of as being under the covenant of works. The reason why you do not think this way is because they have moved from the employee/employer relationship to the familial relationship. How did this happen? It happened by a unilateral work of covenant grant (or grace) on the part of God to them. That is, though they had violated the covenant, God nevertheless, because he was pleased to do it, condescended to them in a gracious covenant, to grant them eternal life in a completely different way: through the gift of faith according to election.

Remember when God came to our first parents after the fall? It says that they heard God's voice and hid (*Gen 3:10*). God found them and questioned them. But then, in the middle of pronouncing judgment, he made the most startling prophecy, “*The seed of the woman will crush the head of the Serpent*” (*Gen 3:15*). This was an unexpected ray of light in an otherwise dark, dark day. *But this light was the light of covenantal “grant.”* God would grant that some child of Eve's would destroy Satan and evil, and there was nothing that was required of Adam and Eve to do. In fact, continuing the gracious theme, God took our mother and father and *clothed them in the skins of an animal*, prefiguring the bloody sacrifice that would be necessary to overcome sin.

But this is more than just identification with something in the future. This was actually the “cutting” of a new covenant. *Michael Horton* explains that in the ancient world, “*The covenant was the cutting and vice versa.*”¹ *Delbert Hillers* explains, “*The most widely attested form of swearing to a covenant, involved cutting up an animal. . . The man taking the oath is identified with the slaughtered animal.*”² The idea is that the one swearing the oath is in effect saying, “*If I do not perform what I have sworn, may what happens to this animal happen to me.*” And so what is taking place here in *Genesis 3:21* is the beginning of different covenant. It is a *covenant of promises*, a *covenant of grants*, a covenant where God performs what is sworn, and the people take his word on faith.

¹ Michael Horton, *God of Promise*, 41.

² Delbert Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*, 40-41.

This covenant is, in many ways, the antithesis of the covenant of works, because **faith is the diametrical opposite of works**. It isn't that faith does not obey. Of course, true faith leads to obedience. But that faith is not itself a thing that you do to earn God's favor. Faith is the "condition of the grant," but it is actually something that comes with the grant. This is why we understand that the covenant of grace is given to the elect. Though it is offered to many, and some foolishly reject it, the elect obtain it because God grants them faith.

Now, in history, God graciously grants many things by way of this covenant. **Noah** was promised that never again would God destroy the earth because of our sin, even though every thought of our heart is only evil all the time. This, God says, is his "**covenant with you and your offspring, and with every living creature**" (**Gen 9:9-10**). What does Noah have to do to earn the reward here? Nothing. Because it is not a suzerainty treaty, but a covenant of grant. God simply swears to perform what he has promised. Noah, in faith, receives it as true and offers sacrifices to God in thanksgiving.

The same kind of grant is offered again to his son **Shem** in the form of a blessing. "**Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem**" (**Gen 9:26-27**). Again, the same kind of grant is given to Abram. In fact, Abram's grant is a direct genealogical fulfillment of the earlier promise to Shem. "**I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**" (**Gen 12:2-3**). The grant also included the land of Canaan as an inheritance (**vs. 7**).

What had Abram merited to deserve this reward? Nothing. What was Abram doing when God called him? He was busy worshipping idols with his father in Babylon. But what was Abram's response to God's promise? "**Abram believed the LORD, and it was counted to him as righteousness**" (**Gen 15:6**). It was faith that obtained the promises and faith that kept the promises. It is not *faithfulness*, as if Abraham had to do something by faith in order to be credited with righteousness. It was simple, pure, unadulterated *belief* and acceptance that what God swore he would do would be done, in spite of the circumstances which said that it was all impossible. It is faith alone that receives the promises of God as true and good and possible.

What happens when people confuse these two covenants? They invariably mix works and faith together, which is why I brought up *faithfulness* a moment ago. This is the error of the **Galatians**, who said that after beginning with the Spirit now had to be perfected by the law. It is the error of **Rome**, which says that we merit justification by what we do after a long life lived. It is the error of the **Methodists**, who insisted that you could become perfect by doing good things. It is the error of the **New Perspective**, which says that covenant faithfulness (that is obedience to the law) keeps us righteous in God's sight. And all of it occurs because people fail to realize that there are only two covenants that exist in the Bible.

These two covenants are the two ways of obtaining God's favor. One is through works. The other is by believing God. One is through my righteousness. The other is through accepting the righteousness of another. One maintains itself through deeds. The other recognizes the power of God alone is able to maintain anyone.

Two Covenants at Sinai

Now, I need to show you how this relates to Exodus 19. Before I get to that, I want you to consider two different assessments of Moses by the prophets. Jeremiah says, "In the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt I did not speak to your fathers or charge them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this charge I gave them, "Hear my voice, and I will be your God, and you will be my people, and you will walk in the way I will command you so that it will be well with you" (Jer 7:22-23). On the other hand, Ezekiel says, "I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and do them; keep my sabbaths holy, and it will be a sign between you and me to know that I am the Lord your God." But they rebelled against me. . . And I gave them statutes that did not result in good [for them] and judgments in which they could not live" (Ezek 20:19-25).

Both prophets refer to the days of the Exodus. Yet, one talks about a covenant that had nothing to do with burnt offerings and sacrifices. The other talks about one that has to do with both. One says the command is to "hear my voice." The other says there were many judgments to keep and do. One implies something easy, simply hearing. The other says the command is hard to live by. Therefore, there has to be two kinds of covenants that are noticeable in the events during the days of the Exodus.

People are very confused about almost all things concerning Israel today, and one of the greatest sources of confusion lies in understanding what kind of covenant Israel was under. To understand the covenant that *is* given to Israel, you first have to understand the covenant that was *not* given. These covenants are not differentiated so much by law vs. no law so much as by their relationship to the law. To see this, we want to break the chapter into two halves. The first is Ex 19:1-17. The second is 19:18-25.

These two halves are divided up according to **two priesthoods**. In the first half it says, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:6). In the second half it says, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests *and the people* break through to come up" (vs. 24). The first half refers to the **whole assembly as a priesthood**. The second half refers to a **special class of priests** within the assembly. The two priesthoods actually reflect an important shift in the chapter. They are like markers designating that something important has changed.

That "important thing" is **the refusal of the people to hear God's voice and believe**. Exodus 19:9 says, "The LORD said to Moses, Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may *hear* when I speak with you, and may also *believe* you forever." "Hearing" and

“believing” were the terms of the covenant. On the morning of the third day, there were “thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast.” What was the response of the people? Two things. First, they “trembled” (vs 16). Second, they took their stand “at the foot of the mountain” (17), before God actually came to them with the Ten Commandments. What is going on here? Exodus 20:18-19 is a commentary that sheds a great deal of light on what took place. “When all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.’”

Let me unpack what happened here. Exodus 19:5-6 (in the ESV) begins by saying, “If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples for the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” There are three Hebrew words I want to tell you about. The first is the word “obey.” It is the word *shama*. We have seen it already in vs. 9 where it says “the people may hear when I speak.” The word can be translated as “hear” or “obey.” I believe the better translation here is “to hear.” Why? Consider Genesis 3:8 as a relevant example. The ESV says, “[Adam and Eve] heard (*shama*) the sound (*qol*) of the LORD.” This verse is relevant for another word. It is the word *qol*, which here is translated “sound,” and in Exodus 19:5 is translated as “voice,” and in Exodus 19:16 is translated “thunder.” In other words, the same thing happened to Adam that is now happening to Israel. Adam wasn’t obeying or disobeying God’s voice here. He was listening, and he was afraid. Israel also heard the “voice” of the LORD, and to them it sounded like thunder and they were terrified. So Exodus 19:5 appears to be telling us that Israel was to hear the voice of God and respond appropriately. How? By the third word: By “keeping” the covenant. The word “keep” here is the word *shamar*. It is used often for the priesthood who were to guard the temple (Gen 3:24; Num 3:7, cf. Gen 2:15). The idea could very well be that they were to be guardians of the covenant.

Summarizing: At this point, all Israel is told to do is to hear God’s voice and guard the covenant. And how? By believing (vs. 9) God and his prophet rather than being fearful and untrusting. Saving faith is not fearful, but perfect love casts out fear. The word “to believe” is the word *aman*, and it is the same word used of Abram in Genesis 15:6. Their response to the covenantal grant is straightforward, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (vs. 8). Yet, this is troubling. For rather than confess faith, they begin speaking about the covenant as if it were by works. “All the LORD has spoken we will do.” This is a subtle, yet deadly shift.

In response to their response, God gives them about four specific commandments. They were to consecrate themselves, like priests, washing their garments in the miraculous river that flowed from the rock (vs. 10). They were to put up police tape around the mountain and not set foot upon it, upon sentence of execution (vs. 12-13). Then they were to wait for three days (vs. 11). Then, on the third day, at the sound of the trumpet blast, they were to come up on the mountain (vs. 13). Verse 13 is really important to understanding the whole story. For one thing

it seems in contradiction to vs. 23. I'll come to that in a moment. For now, I want you to look at the word "to" in the ESV. "To" the mountain is not justified grammatically. The word "to" is not in the text, but a different word "on" is.³ The ESV and other translations are trying to harmonize what appears to them a contradiction. Yet, there is no contradiction if you understand this correctly. God had told Moses earlier, that they would worship him on ('*al*) the mountain (Ex 3:12). Vs. 13 in the Hebrew makes it abundantly clear that at some point in time, Israel was not only *allowed* to come up the mountain, they were *commanded* to.

So here is the problem. God had invited the entire congregation to come up the mountain. But in fear, they refused to heed. Instead, they "*took their stand at the foot of the mountain*" (vs. 17). This was the outcome of their sin of unbelief. God had welcomed them, one and all, into his immediate presence on the side of the mountain (corresponding to the holy place in the tabernacle). They refused to enter. Instead, they stayed outside in the courtyard. As the next chapter elaborates, "*They stood far off*" (Ex 20:18, 20). This is not unlike Adam who, when hearing the voice of the LORD hid himself under a tree.

Because they would not accept his *gracious* invitation to come into his presence, God's posture towards them changed. And because of it, their relationship to the law was about to change too. At first, God is welcoming Israel to come up the mountain. But by vs. 23, "*the people cannot come up to Mount Sinai*" at all. It gets even worse. Vs 21 says, "*Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish*" (also vs. 24). Though they would not "hear," the temptation was still to gaze, to look upon God, as so many today continue to want to do. Even the priests were told that they must consecrate themselves lest the LORD break out against them (vs. 22).

Though God has not changed, his attitude towards the people clearly has. Now, because they would not approach him in faith (because they were terrified), he had to set up rules and regulations to keep them from destroying themselves. It isn't that the rules have changed, but that the relationship between God and Israel has changed. Because they would not believe God as Abraham did, the graciousness of the covenant turns into a legal nightmare. In other words, what I am suggesting is that the opposite of Adam's situation happens to Israel. **In Eden**, God placed Adam under a *covenant of works*. Adam was *terrified of the voice* of the LORD, and hid himself after he sinned. But in *grace*, God came to him again in a covenant of grant which gave him eternal life. **At Sinai**, God started with a very *gracious covenant*, offering the whole assembly life on the mountain in God's presence. He would be their God and they would be his people. This is in line with the gracious dealings with Abraham that the whole Exodus is built upon (Ex 2:24, 6:4-5). The law, which was going to come, for sinners are never without law, would be understood from the perspective of gratitude. But now, it would be understood from the perspective of a tutor and a taskmaster. And it would become an unbearable burden for the people. To put it another way, because they rejected grace, God put them back under works (as a nation). This is why the national promises were now attained through obedience. If they obey,

³ This is reflected in the LXX's preposition *epi* (on). See Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 382.

they enter the land and stay in it. If they disobey, they don't. It is just like Adam. We know what happened to him, and we know what happened to them.

The New Covenant

How is this relevant to today? Actually, the answer is crystal clear in the NT. Everyone is born under the curse for violating the covenant of works which they are also born into. And yet, Christ has taken away the curse of the law by obeying it perfectly as a man. The terms of the covenant of works have been fulfilled by the second Adam, and thus God can give Christ's life to whomever he pleases. This comes through the new covenant, which is utterly gracious and utterly just at the same time, a perfect coalescence of the two covenants we have talked about here, because God is able to show grace because of Christ's works. He is able to give you a condition of faith and cause you to meet the condition by granting it to you.

What I want you to think about is your response to the voice of God. Remember, Adam fled when he heard the voice of the LORD. Remember, Israel refused to go near to God when they heard the voice of the LORD. The Psalmist tells a later generation, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." But the Apostles apply this voice of God to the Lord Jesus saying, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on" (Heb 4:7-8).

The voice of Jesus is the voice of *rest*. Jesus himself said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). Or as Hebrews puts it, "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (Heb 4:9-10). Those who continually labor to work, work, work and are fixated upon that rather than Christ have not entered God's rest and remain under the covenant of works. And they can name the name of Jesus the whole while, for many will say "Lord, Lord" and he will say "away, I never knew you."

But Jesus says, "Everyone who *hears these words of mine and does them* will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock" (Matt 7:24). But what does it mean to "do" Jesus words? What is the "work" of God? "That you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:29). For beloved, the promise is sure, "The sheep *hear his voice*, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). "My sheep *hear my voice*, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will *hear the voice of the Son of God*, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25).

The voice of God is the voice of God's Son, who calls you today to believe and trust in him and to confess him before others. It is the same voice they heard and were so terrified by, yet it is clothed now in frail humanity for your sake, so that you might no longer be frightened. If you hear his voice, then you will do what he commands out of gratitude and thankfulness, for this is the power of God. Your position to the law will have changed and you will have new found joy for the law that those under the burden of law-keeping can never know. You will

come out from under the burdensome, heavy obligations of the covenant of works, so that you might serve God now in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. The law still obtains to all people, yet it does not have the same hold upon us as it does for others, because we understand God's grace. Rest in Christ as you hear his voice calling you today. The Scripture is all about him. You come to *him* in order that you might have eternal life. He welcomes you into his presence on the mountain if you will come to him by faith and not be fearful any longer.