

God covenants and creates relationships

A "Choral" Reading and Reflections on covenants in the scriptures

Readings

Recruit four readers to read the following passages of scripture.

Reader #1: When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, ...Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him. "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful... And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, ... and I will be their God." [Excerpted from Genesis 17]

A brief silence is observed

Reader # 1: You are our God; All: **And we are your people.** [cf. Jeremiah 30:22]

Reader #2: God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name 'the Lord' I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.... I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.... I will take you as my people, and I will be your God." [Excerpted from Exodus 6]

A brief silence is observed

Reader # 2: You are our God; All: **And we are your people.**

Reader #3: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.... I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." [Excerpted from Isaiah 42]

A brief silence is observed

Reader # 3: You are our God; All: **And we are your people.**

Reader #4: Know, then, that I have sent this command to you, so that my covenant with Levi may hold, says the Lord of hosts. My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; [this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in integrity and uprightness.... Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? {Let us, therefore, not be...} faithless to one another, {but remember... the covenant of our ancestors...} [Excerpted and adapted from Malachi 2]

A brief silence is observed

Reader # 4: You are our God; All: **And we are your people.**

Reflections/discussion

Prepare a piece of newsprint to record responses to the following:

- 1) In the light of the passages just read, what does God wish to give the covenant partners?
- 2) In the light of the passages just read, what does God wish to give the world?

[In responding, consider especially the role of the "servant" in Isaiah 42. This vocation as servant is one of the blessings which God intends to give to the covenant partners. Being "a light to the nations" seems to call the covenant partner(s) into a role of communicating God's intentions to bless all people(s). Recall that the "servant" is sometimes thought to be a particular historical figure; sometimes the entire people of Israel. Later Christian interpretation claims this image as a way to understand Jesus and his ministry, passion, death and resurrection.]

- 3) In our here and now, what does God wish to give us?

Through which covenants with us is God seeking to give us those blessings? [The leader may wish to consult "The Why and What of Ministry Covenants" for background if needed.]

[Compare the responses to the three sets of discussion questions above and discuss points of similarity.]

Divine/Human Covenants

In future personal or group bible study, it may be illuminating to explore the range and terms of divine/human covenants to which the scriptures bear witness. As always when interpreting the scriptures, it is not advisable to apply them directly to our circumstances without a searching discernment process, led by the Spirit's guidance to us today.

Partner	Passage	Terms
Creation of human beings	Ecclesiasticus 17:12 (& cf. Genesis 1&2)	Endowed with abilities & limits; bestowed knowledge of God's will; commanded love of neighbour
Noah & all flesh	Genesis 6:18-9:17	Not destroy by flood, sign of rainbow
Abram/Sarai	Genesis 15:18-17:21	Land and descendants, sacrifices, circumcision
Moses and all Israel	Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua (cf. Also 1 & 2 Chronicles), Psalms	Remembering covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; exodus; rites and observances with respect to ark of the covenant; Sabbath observance; tablets of stone; Mt. Horeb; awesome marvels; covenants with Canaan's inhabitants prohibited; salt offerings; remembering and reminders; warnings concerning breaking covenant; renewed at Moab; land flowing with milk & honey; taking possession of Canaan; renewed through Joshua, statutes at Shechem; recalled/celebrated in psalms
Phinehas	Numbers 25: 12,13	Peace and perpetual priesthood
David	2 Samuel 7; 23:5; 2 Chronicles 7:18	A dynasty; salt
Jehoiada, Joash, Israel	2 Kings 11:17	Israel shall be the Lord's people, Joash made king
Josiah, Israel	2 Kings 23:2, 3, 21	Covenant renewed
Asa and faithful Israelites	2 Chronicles 15:12	Abolish idols, seek the Lord, oaths
Ezra and Israel	Ezra 10:3	Foreign wives and children rejected
Isaiah, Israel, the nations	Isaiah 42:6	A light to the nations
Isaiah, Israel, eunuchs & foreigners	Isaiah 54ff.	Keep Sabbath, God's words shall not depart, love justice
Jeremiah, Israel	Jeremiah 31:31, 32, 33	A new covenant, written on their hearts, no 2 nd hand knowledge of God necessary
Hosea, animals	Hosea 2:18	Lie down in safety
Zechariah	Zechariah 11:10	Annuling the covenant made with all the peoples[?!]
Malachi, Levi?	Malachi 2:4, 5, 8, 10, 14; 3:1	Life and well-being, the messenger of the covenant coming
Israel's ancestors & descendants	Luke 1:72 [Song of Zechariah]	Covenant with Israel recalled, birth of Jesus prophesied
Jesus	Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; cf. Hebrews	Cup, blood of the covenant
Paul, disciples of Jesus	2 Corinthians 3:6; 3:14; Galatians 3:17	Ministers of a new covenant; old set aside in Christ; promise not nullified
God, Jesus, readers of the Letter to the Hebrews	Hebrews 7:22; 8:6, 7, 9, 10	Jesus mediator of a better, new covenant; fault found with the first covenant; old obsolete; redeemed from the transgressions under the first, promise eternal inheritance; inaugurated with blood