

Dr. Meredith Kline, Kingdom Prologue, Lecture 8

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Alright, shall we pray together as we start. *“O Lord we thank thee that thou art a faithful God of the covenant. We thank thee that all of the good promises which were made of old time to which thou did commit thyself, promises of salvation and eternal life of the kingdom of glory, all of these promises have been met and have been filled in our yea and amen in Christ Jesus our Lord. He is the one who will be exalted in our hearts. We pray that as our study is directed through the pages of the Old Testament and our eyes directed onto his coming and that we shall behold him as the one who is the answer to our life’s problems, as the one to whom we should fall down and adore and ascribe all worth and honor and glory. We thank thee that tonight as we gather about thy word that we may have confidence that as we look to thee for thy Spirit, that thou will grant us, that the Spirit shall be our instructor. To take of the things of Christ and to reveal them unto us. We will not just be edified ourselves but we will be equipped for ministry. We pray then that in all of our study, that we might be learning from the Scripture those things which in turn we may impart in the form of sound doctrine to others that thy church, that the lamps might be lit, and thy church might be built up to the ends of the earth. Be with us to bless us this night. Make us a blessing in days to come for Christ our Lord. Amen.”*

Review and Introduction: Covenant

I keep losing my glasses, but here we are. Okay, last time then we got going according to our outline on the subject of an overview of the covenants. We began appropriately then with the discussion of the definition of covenant and got beyond that into at least the beginning of the survey of the overview of the covenants. In the process of talking about the definition of the covenant which you may recall I ended up defining the term somewhat like this, that the covenant is

essentially a matter of solemn commitments with a divine sanction. If you want to add a little bit to it in terms of its function, these are instruments whereby God administers his kingdom. So then the essential idea in biblical covenants is the idea of commitments, commitments made with divine sanctioning where God himself makes the commitments or where they are made in his presence with him as a witness and as the enforcer, sanctioner of the arrangement. Especially in the covenant that we're concerned about, are those that accompany the ongoing history of God's kingdom. They are instruments whereby God defines the accessive arrangements for the people of his history.

Ancient Near Eastern Treaties

So, as I was developing that, there was one area of evidence that throws light on what biblical covenants are. I would get back to that to develop it a little more namely the treaties that are available to us ones that are particularly interesting, that come from about the time of Moses. So there were these treaties which in their general concept and remarkable detail in their legal literary form are comparable to what we're talking about in the Bible. Here in the Bible we have these covenantal arrangements between the Lord, the great king and the servant people. Then, lo and behold we find that in the practice of Near Eastern diplomacy, that there are documents that very closely resemble the covenants that we have in the Bible. Then the particular point, there are many aspects of this that are interesting that could take us in a different directions, the central thing at the moment that I'm trying to bring out is that these Near Eastern treaty arrangements, which are so close in their form to the biblical covenants were themselves known as "oaths and bonds." That brings out what I was trying to figure out in my definition. These are arrangements involving centrally the thought that someone is taking an oath whereby obligation bonds are assumed. It's not the idea of bonds in the sense of fellowship but a bond in the sense of an obligation that one is bound to do so. I'll come back to that point.

First, let's take a look at that. Those of you who have sat through courses

with me before are more than familiar with what I'm about to say. To others it may be new. Actually when I first got into this material of the ancient Near Eastern treaties thirty odd years ago or whatever, it was brand new. The parallels that I'm talking about now with these biblical covenants and ancient Near Eastern treaties had just come to light. I came into this thing right away and distributed a couple of articles to the subject of which we're going to be talking about. Since then everyone is now on the bandwagon and it's quite common all over the place.

But what we're talking about, the situation was, here's a great empire and let's say here's the Hittite empire up there that we now know as Asia Minor. They would relate to surrounding smaller kingdoms not just by conquering them and deposing their local king and placing some governor or so on in his place, but through treaty diplomacy. They would arrange for a suzerain-vassal type of relationship where the local king maintained his throne and so on, but in a condition where he was a tributary to the great king. The local king kept his throne and his kingdom but as sort of a protectorate of the great king--the suzerain. The way that this arrangement then was provided for was by way of treaties. The treaties would involve documents but on the occasion of their ratification there would be a ceremony, a solemn oath and so on were taken. Especially then, the documents, at the moment that we're interested in, in effect the great king would provide a constitution for the subordinate king or the lesser king, that would define the nature of his relationship to the great king. We're especially interested in the treaties from here and there all over the Near East. The ones that first caught the eyes of scholarship and the ones that have particularly close bearing on biblical covenants are the ones that come from the Hittite empire. There are a couple dozen or so of these treaties.

Pattern/Form of the Hittite Treaties

What we wanted to do first of all then is to see the pattern of these treaties, and then see how they are the explanation for what's going on in what we normally call the ten commandments there in Exodus 20, the Decalogue, and also

in the book of Deuteronomy. Here are the ancient Near Eastern treaties. The Hittite treaties were made with various vassal kings in the neighborhood.

We'll be pointing out that there were six standard divisions. Now there is a question of the evolution of this form. We're talking about a second millennium form because that's the form that Moses would've been acquainted with. Moses functioned in the third quarter of the second millennium B.C. (ca. 1440 or 1260 B.C.) And these treaties come from the third quarter of the second millennium B.C. So they would be common currency in the diplomatic sphere of Moses' day.

The Preamble: Form and Function

They began with two sections that I refer to as the establishing of the claims. Here's the great king and the bottom line here is that he is going to exact tribute/support from this vassal. It will be understood in his own self-interest that he will protect this vassal as well, but what is explicit in these treaties is the obligations of the vassal to the great king. So the great king has to establish his claim, why should the vassal bring such honor and support to the great king? Well first of all, was the matters of his identity, the "I am" section--the preamble or the title section. By the way, in the outside reading that we were doing, what we're covering now here would be found in *The Structure of Biblical Authority* and in part 2, and the first two essays that are there. So now you can read on and supplement and clarify for yourself in your readings there.

Page 113 and following in *The Structure of Biblical Authority* is where you would start out then: "I am Suppiluliuma," or whatever his name was, "the son of the great god the king of kings, the king of all lands." So there would be a title section using all types of grandiose titles to impress. The motivation here is that of awe and fear.

I started to say that there was an evolution of the form. By the time that we come to second millennium there are still these treaties but with very significant changes in the form that are important when it comes to questions of higher criticism and dating the works of Moses and showing the support that they've

actually come from the second millennium in terms of the fact that they date like the second millennium forms of treaties rather than as from the first millennium treaties, where modern criticism would date this book. So we would recognize it's in line with Moses. But in the second millennium form, the time of Moses.

God gives the title, the "I Am." In Exodus 20: "I am the Lord your God." So that is not part of the first commandment. In your Sunday worship using some hymnal that has the ten commandments in the back that can be used in reading back and forth. I know of one where it starts off with the first commandment beginnings with "I am the Lord your God," and so on. This was not part of the first commandment. It was the preamble to the treaties. As a matter of fact that's part of the importance of what were talking about now, it gives a more genuine concept of what the ten commandments are. It has important implications. The ten commandments are not some law code like the Code of Hammurabi or something of that sort. No, the ten commandments are a treaty. They are a treaty between the Lord and a particular people. They are not a general moral code that God gave to all men everywhere for all time. They are a very special particular thing that God gave to the people Israel at a certain juncture there, in the history of God's covenanting of his kingdom. It begins then as treaties would begin with an "I am" section: "I am the Lord your God." What more need he say, if the motivation here is for fear and awe and honor, "I am the Lord your God"--enough said. You don't need to elaborate on it.

Deuteronomy and the Treaty Form

Now you come to the book of Deuteronomy. My contention was in the second early article I wrote that here was an area that the modern critics to the extent that they have gotten into this subject were ignoring the book of Deuteronomy because they date the book of Deuteronomy at about the seventh century B.C. (620 B.C.) rather than back in the days of Moses in the third quarter of the second millennium B.C. (ca. 1440 or 1260 B.C.)

Here the form critical fact, actually seems to be showing that the book of Deuteronomy fits hand in glove, into the form or treaties that existed back in the second millennium where you would expect Moses was the author. This, of course, contradicts the notion of the higher critics that it was produced many centuries later (ca. 620 B.C.).

So in the book of Deuteronomy then the same thing is true. It begins then with the equivalent of a preamble wherein Moses is set forth as the representative. These are authoritative words because they come from God's representative-- Moses. The outline if you have a *Kingdom Prologue* that will help me here. On page 133, not *The Kingdom Prologue* but *The Structural of Biblical Authority*, on page 133, you have the whole outline. So as you see there is the preamble the first five verses, one through five.

So the book of Deuteronomy turns out to be a treaty. Then interestingly at the end as you well notice, it has the account of Moses' death because the particular character of this treaty was a succession treaty. The death of one of the principles to the treaty requires that the successor be appointed to the treaty had that in mind and I'll come back to that. The overall form of Deuteronomy is actually that of a treaty.

The Historical Prologue Section of the treaty

The second claim is embodied in what is called a "historical prologue." Along with the appeals to fear and honor and respect, there was also an appeal to gratitude. So it means that the historical prologue is the great king who would try to prompt some response of gratitude by reminding the vassal of all the good things that allegedly he had done to them or their father's beforehand. So the great king might say here to the vassal king, "Look, I had a covenant relationship with your father didn't I. When he was on the throne and things went well. When your father died there was a problem and I took your side so that you could succeed to the throne. I also gave one of my daughters to be your wife." All the good things that he could think of in terms of their past relationship he would mention. So it is

a more winsome appeal, not just “look I have the strength to clobber you if you don’t do what I say,” to go along with it, there’s more than that.

This, as matter of fact, is one of the difference from second millennium treaties and first millennium treaties. Later on when the Assyrians that were making treaties, but they had only the raw power, “do this or else.” Then the historical prologues are missing from the first millennium treaties. But in the ones that come from Moses’ day that’s a very significant part. So past benefits are appealed to.

Exodus 20,” I brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” That’s not part of the first commandment, that’s the historical prologue to a treaty. Preamble--“I am the Lord your God.” Historical prologue—“I brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” The appeal is to the awe inspiring God, the appeal is to his redemptive love and grace for what he has done for them.

That’s why we should be prepared then to do what he requires of us which is the third section: the commandments themselves. The appeals that through the Exodus redemption is the thing that follows.

Then in the book of Deuteronomy you’ll find the historical prologue in chapters 1:6 to the end of chapter 4 are too. It’s a recital of the good things that God has done. Now look this is forty years later; Exodus 20, Deuteronomy, forty years in the wilderness or in the plains of Moab on the banks of Jordan. They’re ready to go over and conquer the lands and settle there. There’s been more recent history when Moses received this revelation than back in Exodus 20 at Sinai. Back then the most recent thing was the exodus. Now God has led them through the wilderness, the beginnings of the conquest on the other side in trans-Jordan; the conquest had begun. So the passage the in 1:6 through chapter 4, the historical prologue in the book of Deuteronomy, brings you up to date. God’s most recent benefits to them are appealed to there. But definitely the pattern is repeating. The pattern of a treaty, not the pattern of a law code.

The Stipulations/Commandments Section

Notice, as I say, after establishing a claim, the claims of who he is and what he has done for them, “Now this is what I expect of you.” By the way, it’s in an “I-Thou” form. The great king speaks what I expect of you. The law codes are not in an “I-thou” form they are in the third person form. When you read through the code of Hammurabi, the case laws that begin with something like *shuma awilan*. “If a man does this if he does that, then such will be the outcome.” If he deserves to die, then he shall die. But that’s not the form here. This is an “I-Thou” type of arrangement.

Now this is what I require of you. Now you’ve got the, what should we call them, the stipulations or the commandments. They are obligations that the great King imposes upon the vassal. Then sometimes this would be divided into general requirements, and then the more specific requirements. The more general thing would be a basic statement of the relationship title of the great king. “I’m the great king, you’re the vassal and that will be our relationship. You will be a friend to my friends and you will be an enemy to my enemies. By the same token I will be a friend to your friends and an enemy to your enemies.” So the fundamental relationship is then defined in this way, that from on the one side, it’s tribute focused, and on the other side it protects the arrangement. So that was the basic general relationship.

Then that would be followed on by all the ancillary requirements; for days of peace, the times of war, during the days of peace, you will make your annual pilgrimages up to my palace and bring your tribute. It would be stipulated how much was required. And in a formal sense in a formal way that compares then to the case of Israel in regards to God as the great king and the temples as his palace and the annual pilgrimage there with the tribute. Then in days of war, of course, “you will be an enemy of my enemies and you will contribute so many chariots and so many troops” and so forth. They had to get involved in expeditions and so on. So there would be the general requirements and then also the specific ones.

Now then, there you have in Exodus 20 the ten commandments. And what I hope now you're beginning to see however, is that although we call them and the Bible itself calls them the 10 words or the 10 commandments, now this is what we would call *parse per toto*, it's only a "part of a whole." The commandments are a prominent part of the treaties. But they are only a part of the treaties. So we've got a misconception of what's going on here in Exodus 20 if you think of them only in terms of the ten commandments we lose the thought that this is a treaty and it's a very distinctive and meaningful thing.

But there you have the ten commandments. Beginning with the general ones, the general relationship between the vassal people of Israel and Yahweh the God of Israel. But you'll have an exclusive whole-soul devotion and commitment to worship me. I am indeed the Lord your God and this defines their relationship to God. Then you go on from there to the other related commandments which have to do with the way you are going to behave within my kingdom in relation to your neighbors who are my friends. So you will be friends with them and those are, of course, it works out, you will be an enemy to my enemies and those Baal worshipers and Canaanites are enemies and you will be an enemy to them, as the way it will all work out eventually.

But here then you have the commandments in the book of Deuteronomy and you have that section extending from chapter 5 through 26. Once again with the more general requirements going on in about the first six of those chapters. Then the more specific requirements of all kinds going on through the 26th chapter. These are treaties we're dealing with. Treaties that are not law codes.

Document clause

Now there are three other sections. Let me take a minute and detail them in order. The next one is called the "document clause." As I said, documents were involved, it was not that great king would send someone or he himself would come and orally deliver the contents of this treaty. No, the thing was written down in text and so the treaty expresses that idea, in the fact. If you're going to use the

word treaty and covenant and to distinguish between them you might want to use the word “treaty” for the document and “covenant” for the relationship. So there is a document that is available we can see read to the people on this occasion. What to do with this document in the days to come. Just for the moment let me say and we’ll come back to that. But the document then was to be a witness to the covenantal arrangement. It was to be preserved in the temple, the holy place of the god (or gods). Periodically you would bring it forth and to read it to the people, keep them alert in what their obligations were. And of course, coming to the curses and the blessings. So they would be alerted not only to what their obligations were, but they would be discouraged from disobedience or rebellion by the curses. They’d be encouraged to obedience by the blessings. But periodically the document was called forth and it is read to the people.

Now that particular feature, do you find that in Exodus 20? No, why not? The reason is the document is to be brought to the temple and deposited there. Exodus 20, there is no temple, no tabernacle yet. So in Exodus you read, chapter 19 through 24, in the midst of which you have this treaty we’re talking about. This whole section then is dealing with the covenant ceremony. The reading of the document, the sacrifices and so on that accompany it there is but no tabernacle yet. Now, of course, you move on to chapter 25, now you begin to get the instructions to the building of God’s houses, the tabernacle, the temple.

The very first thing then that was discussed at any length was the ark of the covenant. Immediately when discussing that, and here’s the first place where this idea could possibly come up in the text, it tells you to take those tables of the covenant and put them in the ark. So the equivalent of this fourth section are not right within Exodus 20, but it does emerge in the actual practice of Israel in the fact that this document is deposited there in the temple. In fact, there’s an even closer analogy because the language in the treaties say that you were to take documents/treaties and you were to put it under the feet of the god, or ultimate god, in that’s gods temple.

Now where then were the two tables of the covenant put? They were put in the ark and how does the Bible conceptualize the ark--that is God's footstool. That is his throne. He is enthroned between the cherubim, the ark is the footstool and therefore to put the tables of the covenant in the ark, is literally to put it under the feet of God. This is an exact correspondence then, to what was called for in the document clause over here.

Then in the book of Deuteronomy, in the closing chapters, I don't have the exact verse here, you have again the thought then that the book of the covenant was to be laid up by the ark in the temple. In the book of Deuteronomy you've got the further equivalent of the document clause because the book of Deuteronomy specifies that this treaty is to be brought forth and read to the people just as the international treaties required that the treaty be read periodically to the people. So the book of Deuteronomy every seventh year, there was the release in connection with the feast of tabernacles. This book was to be brought forth, this treaty, and read to the people. So it's quite remarkable how this parallel continues across the board.

Witnesses

Now the fifth section of the treaty...

[**Student question:** Were the documents laid at the feet of the king or the god?]

Kline's answer:--at the feet of the god. Each king had a copy and each king put it under the feet of his god in the temple. I'll be coming back to that.

Now the fifth point is, in the international treaties there was an invocation of the gods. These were not just secular contracts. This was all operating in the sacred sphere, the religious sphere. Superstitiously, they're not thinking of the true God, nevertheless in their terms it was religious. They conceived of the gods as the one who is going to witness of the arrangement and who were to be the enforcers of it. So there would be the invocation of the gods to be witnesses, however you want to express that--divine witnesses.

And they would go through all the lists of the gods, the ones that were active in the cult and the others and comprehensively cover them and they would end up with sort of general classifications like the gods of the mountains and the hills and of heaven and earth and that kind of language is found.

Now, in Exodus, are you going to find Yahweh, the God who in the Ten Commandments here has already identified himself as the one and true and only living God with whom alone they must have relations. Is he about now to invoke a bunch of other gods to be witnesses? Obviously not. Here you run into a big theological difference between what's going on in the two situations that will not allow God's treaty with his people to include a section where they and he would be appealing to any other gods because he alone. So you can understand why you wouldn't have the equivalent to that in either Exodus 20 or in Deuteronomy.

What is interesting however, is that in spite of the theological tension involved, that elsewhere there is this place which if you read in these chapters here, you can find the details. The various places in Deuteronomy and in the prophets in God's lawsuit, you'll find that when God is appealing to his people, he invokes heaven and earth. He invokes heaven and earth to be witnesses between him and his people. Now it's just a rhetorical device of course, but it happens in this rhetorical device where God personifies heaven and earth, where he uses the language that is found in the appeal to the divine witnesses and the international treaties because as I've said they end up with a general mention of the gods of heaven and earth. So, even there there's something of an echo of that section in spite of the theological differences.

Sanctions: blessing and curses

Finally, the gods are called to be witnesses just before the sanctions. They are the ones who are to keep an eye, you see, on the people and make sure they do not stray. They will then be in a position, you see, to enforce the cursings and the blessings. So the cursings and the blessings of the covenant. This is what will happen to you if you break the covenant. It spelled out all kinds of curses. These

are the blessings that will follow. The gods are the ones who are actually thought of as enforcing these.

Now then are there any curses and blessings in Exodus 20? Not as a section at the end, but as a matter of fact even in the extra biblical treaties this was not always the section at the end, sometimes these curses and blessings would be interwoven as commandments along the way. That's the way we find it in Exodus 20. So you think through the language of Exodus 20, and here and there, there are promises and then there are threats. "The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vein,"--threat. The promise the children for obedience to their parents of a long life "in the land the Lord your God gives you." So here and there dispersed among the ten commandments, among the stipulations, we do find the blessings and the curses of the covenant.

Then in a big way in the book of Deuteronomy you have a very extensive detailed section of sanctions in chapters 27-30. As you read through those chapters you find yourself with a sort of a preview of the whole ongoing history of Israel leading down to their constant covenant breaking, their failures, their whole history of Israel is a tale of God as faithful and Israel as unfaithful. That's the whole story in a nutshell in all the books. In fact, that's why all of these history books were written. They were written by the prophets themselves, to provide sort of a brief so that when it came time to conduct God's lawsuit against Israel, here would be the record right in hand. The history book that had been prepared. God had not broken his covenant, Israel had broken its covenant. That's why now, this is what's going to happen to you, you're going to go into exile and so forth. That's what you get in the book of Deuteronomy.

Back to the document clause: two tablets (Ex. 20)

Now then, there's this extensive pattern. Now let me now just back up to that fourth section and fill in one further detail about it. As we were saying then, there's the great king and the vassal and each one gets a copy of this treaty and they put it under the feet of their respective god.

Now that feature is then reflected here in Exodus 20 as well. But it has been missed because we have misunderstood the whole business about the two tables of the covenant. Traditionally when people think of the two tables of the covenant, they think Table 1 commandments 1, let's say, through 4. Of course, this already has lost track of the fact that there's a historical prologue and there's a preamble. It isn't just 10 commandments, but forgetting that for a moment, is what we usually get is the thought there are two tables. The first one has these commandments on it, and the second table has these then. So the first table is equated with our duty to God. Now Jesus, of course, distinguishes among the laws and requirements, the first law the ultimate primary law of our duty to God. And he distinguishes that then secondly from our duty to our neighbor. Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor. But we have falsely done, what Jesus didn't do. What we have done is we have taken what he says about these two areas, our duty to God and our duty to man and we have equated them with the first table and the second table. Jesus didn't do that and that's completely phony and false. If you can get it out of your head please do.

What's really going on here. Here's just another point, throughout there's just amazingly detailed correspondence between what God is doing for Israel and what's going on over there. It's perfectly obvious, is it not, that here again what we're dealing with is, God has a copy and the people have a copy. The suzerain has a copy and the people have a copy and each one has a complete copy. So the first table is the treaty--the title, historical prologue, the commandments, the sanctions, the whole thing. The second table, the same thing, it's a duplicate. Israel has a copy. God has a copy.

So if you're looking for historical authenticity and genuineness then you're going to have to throw this whole tradition out and I hope you all have more success than I've had in 30 years of trying. You just can't get the idea out it's so implanted in people's heads that the first table of the law is the commandments toward God and the second table is toward one's neighbor. I despair, there's just

not doubt about it that these are complete duplicate copies. Why you can't get the idea through, I'm just not quite sure. I guess its just the inertia of tradition.

Nature of Covenants

Now then, what does this tell us then about the nature of covenants. These arrangements, which are so remarkably like the treaty arrangements that God makes for example with Israel through Moses, these arrangements were known as "oaths and bonds." That's what a treaty was, where the people would have to commit themselves by a solemn oath. Because that's what happened next, the treaty would be read "this is what I require of you. Now will you do this?" The proper response was "Amen, we will do that." That's what Israel does at Sinai as this material is read to them. Israel you've hear what God requires, and Israel says "all that the Lord has spoken, we will do." They're in the presence of God and his terrible theophany. They make this solemn affirmation of allegiance to him, and that is certainly tantamount to an oath. Then there are the actual ceremonies that accompany that which at least in part are symbolizing the curse that will befall them if they break that arrangement.

Treaty form and Inspiration

So in terms of definition, this parallelism I think underscores the basic point we tried to make. It involves, of course, this whole thing there may be something I don't know, if any of you are disturbed by the very fact that here in the Bible it seems that God in order to define his relationship to his own people is borrowing something from the common profane out there. Does that disturb your thought about the inspiration of Scripture at all? It really shouldn't. I think if you think properly of who God is and how he controls all things in his sovereign will, then the way to see it is this: in the third quarter of the second millennium, when he wanted a nice legal diplomatic form, that would meaningfully convey to the Israelites how he related to them, that he was the Lord and they were his servant people; he had in his sovereign providence arranged that such a legal form was available. It was something that was commonly known to people because it was a

language of international diplomacy. So it is nothing that then should call in question the inspiration of this process or the sovereignty or the greatness of God.

It is no different than when God wanted to reveal himself in Scripture he used languages that were there and alive. He didn't invent new languages to speak to the people. He used languages that were available. In general, he didn't invent all kinds of new literary genres or forms to speak to the people. You can analyze the Bible in terms of various forms. So you have laws and you have narratives and you have songs and you have proverbs and you have love songs and you have prophecies and on and on, lamentations. All of these literary forms that God uses to convey his revelation in the Bible are forms that existed before and around Israel in their day. So in his providence, he has means of communication languages, literary forms and so on which he then uses to convey his revelation. Here's another, treaties are just one of the many such forms or genres. I hope that doesn't disturb your thought about inspiration.

Transcribed by Kristen Masta

Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt