

Dr. Tiberius Rata, Old Testament Theology, Session 8, God as Covenant Sustainer and God as Giver of Salvation

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This is Dr. Tiberius Ratta in his teaching on Old Testament Theology. This is session 8, God as Covenant Sustainer and God as Giver of Salvation.

Today, we're going to talk about God as Covenant Sustainer and God as Giver of Salvation.

The Bible teaches that God is not just a covenant maker. He's the covenant sustainer. I'll give you three examples from the covenants we already talked about. For example, in the Abrahamic covenant, God made promises to Abraham.

We talked about great names, great nations, and great land, but there were also conditions, obligations, whatever you want to call them. We see that Abraham and those after him broke some of these covenant obligations or conditions. In chapter 17, verse 1, God says to Abraham, walk before me and be blameless.

Was Abraham blameless? No. We are reminded why J. A. Sanders said that biblical characters are not portraits of morality; they are mirrors of identity. We can see ourselves in them.

We see that even earlier in chapter 12, Abraham lies about Sarah being his sister, and now, in chapter 20, he does it again. Each time, what we see is that it is God who intervenes in our mess to sustain the covenant. So, he appears to Abimelech, he intervenes in the mess Abraham has created.

So, we see that God is not just the covenant-making God, but he is the sustainer of that covenant. God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, behold you are a dead man if God says that to you, you probably should pay attention.

He says because of the woman whom you have taken for, she is a man's wife, and then, of course, God spares Abimelech's life. Here, we see one instance in which God sustains the covenant. A second example has to do with circumcision.

Also, in chapter 17, God says the sign of the covenant, in this case, circumcision. In the case of the covenant with Noah, the sign of the covenant was the rainbow. In the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, the sign of the covenant is circumcision.

And again, this was not optional. This was not optional, and we see that in this episode in Exodus 4 after God selects Moses to be the deliverer, as we see in the episode in Exodus 3 with the burning bush. In chapter 4, we read this very interesting pericope.

At the lodging place on the way, the Lord met him, Moses, and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskins and touched Moses' feet with it and said, surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me. So he let him alone.

It was then that she said a bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision. So again, we have the commandment; we have Moses not following through, and then we see God intervening and leaving him alone. And God sustains the covenant just like he did previously with Abraham.

So God is not just the covenant-making God; he is the covenant-sustaining God. It is God who sustains the covenant. He intervenes in our mess.

The same thing is happening with the Mosaic covenant. We can go through all ten commandments and see how the children of Israel have broken this covenant. I'm just giving two examples here.

You shall have no other gods before me. God makes a covenant with them, and if we read in Exodus chapter 24, we actually see the covenant being confirmed. Yahweh says I do, the people say we do, we will obey.

And what's interesting is that right after that, we have them worshipping a golden calf. Someone put it like this. How serious was this sin? This sin of the golden calf would be like a couple going on their honeymoon, and instead of consummating the marriage, the husband says, oh, tonight I'm going to go sleep with a prostitute.

Basically, this was the gravity of the sin. That's how this was. Because they just said I do.

And then the children of Israel go and worship a golden calf. God says to Aaron, who will go before us. And God actually wants to destroy the people.

But Moses intervened, and Moses interceded for the people, and then the Bible says that God relented from what he was going to do to them. The Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. Then Moses turned down and went down from the mountain.

If you look at the history of Israel, you see how they break this covenant over and over again. They worship other gods, and they basically commit spiritual adultery. In

Jeremiah 11, God says to the people how they have broken this part of the covenant in Jeremiah 11.

They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear my words. They have gone after gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers.

Therefore, thus says the Lord, behold I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to me, I will not listen to me. And yet, it is God who sustains the covenant by making and giving them a new covenant.

And it says, you see, the law written on tablets of stone can be broken. The law written on parchment can be burned in fire. Jeremiah gave the law to the king, the king threw it in the fire.

But the law is written on the heart; who can take it away? Nobody. So that's the beautiful thing about the new covenant promise. Now, through the Holy Spirit, God writes the law on our hearts so we see that God always intervenes in our mess.

Even though we break the covenant, he is the one who sustains the covenant. That was true in the case of Abraham. It is true in the case of Moses.

It's true in the case of David. Remember, God promised a perpetual kingship and perpetual love. But again, in the conversation, in the communication of God with Solomon, there were some if clauses, very important clauses.

In 1 Kings 6, starting in verse 11. Now, the word of the Lord came to Solomon concerning this house that you are building. If you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David, your father, and I will dwell among the children of Israel who will not forsake my people Israel.

If you have all these if clauses. We have the same thing in chapter 8. Remember, God appears to Solomon not once but twice. And again, the if clauses are very important.

Now therefore, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father, what you have promised, saying, you shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel if only your sons pay close attention to their ways to walk before me as you have walked before me. In other words, Solomon knows what God wants. Unfortunately, Solomon consistently and systematically disobeys God.

And by the way, it doesn't start in chapter 11. It actually starts in chapter 3 with him marrying Pharaoh's daughter. Which, by the way, is a brilliant military strategy.

The problem is it went against God's law that said you shall not intermarry with these people. And, of course, chapter 11 of 1 Kings. Now Solomon, King Solomon, loved many foreign women, including the daughter of the Pharaoh.

Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women from the nations concerning which the Lord has said to the people of Israel, you shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, princes, and 300 concubines.

The problem here is that God is not speaking about inter-ethnic marriages. The problem is interfaith marriages. It says here, and his wives turned away his heart.

That is the problem. The problem is not the ethnicity of the person. The problem is the faith of these women.

And the covenant is basically broken through disobedience. But again, we see God intervening, fulfilling, and sustaining the covenant in this case by sending his son Jesus. Again, the gospel of Luke clearly shows that it is through Jesus that the promises given to David are fulfilled.

Again, Luke 2, Luke chapter 1 actually starts in Luke chapter 1 in the communication with Mary. The angel says to Mary, behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and be called the son of the most high, and the Lord will give him the throne of his father, David.

So, it is Jesus through whom God sustains the covenant made with David. It's the same thing Peter does on the day of Pentecost when he preaches and quotes some Psalms, and he wants the people to understand that he is not talking about David. The Psalms, these prophecies were not about David but were about the Messiah, namely Jesus, and that is what we have in chapter 2. For others, I may say to you with confidence about patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Being, therefore, a prophet and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him that he should set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, again the Greek word for Messiah, that he was not abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh see corruption. This is what Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses. So again, we see God intervening, and the God who makes the covenant is the one who sustains it.

We see that in the case of Abraham, Moses, and David. We need to trust and rely on this God who not just makes the covenant but, through his grace, sustains it. Lastly, we need to talk about God as the giver of salvation.

See, when we talk about salvation in the Old Testament, the term first has to do with escaping death and deliverance from enemies, even though it may not have pointed to Jesus Christ yet. So, this is important, and we saw that when we looked at the Psalms, for example. So, when the psalmist is asking for salvation, he is asking for deliverance from death.

In Exodus 15, after the Exodus event, in the song of Moses, the song says, the Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. Well, what salvation? Well, from death. God allowed them to go to the sea and not be killed by the Egyptian army.

So here, salvation has a sense of the direct meaning of salvation from death. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. So, it is not identical; I want us to understand that the term salvation here is not identical to the New Testament concept.

They are similar; there are parallels between the two, but they are not identical. Psalm 14:7. All that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion. When the people restored his people's fortune, Jacob rejoiced, and Israel was glad.

Again, here again, it is salvation from death. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? Again, it is salvation from death. Jeremiah 3, Surely the idolaters' commotion on the hills and mountains is deception.

Surely, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. Jonah is actually quoting from the Psalms, from the belly of the fish, when he says salvation comes from the Lord. What salvation? He is thinking about salvation from death, which he was basically going towards.

But when we talk about salvation, there is also a future aspect of this. There is a future hope for salvation. We see this in the prophets.

Israel will be saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation. Okay, so now we get a sense of not just a temporary salvation from death, but there is an everlasting, eternal dimension to the salvation. You will never be put to shame or disgraced to ages everlasting.

Isaiah 52, 10. The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. So, in the Old Testament time, sometimes God used an anointed one, a Messiah, to carry out his plan.

Well, in the New Testament, that Messiah is the anointed one, the Messiah which is Jesus. But the promise of this Jesus, this Messiah, starts actually in the book of Genesis. We call this the Proto-Evangelion, the first gospel message.

In the language of judgment to the serpent, God says, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. And we know that this is talking about Jesus.

There are two key passages about this. One is in Galatians 3, 16. The promise is made to Abraham and to his offspring.

It doesn't say to offspring referring to many but referring to one and to your offspring, who is Christ. And the other one is in 1 John 3, 8. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

So, the serpent crusher is none other than Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah. So these Messianic prophecies are very, very important because even though at the beginning they don't clearly point to Christ, again, we have the benefit of reading the Bible from right to left, so we know when they are fulfilled in Christ. And we see this clearly in the New Testament.

The Old Testament also says that the Messiah will bring salvation to people, but not in the way we sometimes think, but this servant is actually a suffering servant. And again, that's why the people of Israel didn't always get it, because they imagined a warrior Messiah who would come to destroy the Romans and liberate the country. But in Isaiah 53, we are shown a different type of Messiah.

He grew up before Him like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him and no beauty that we should desire Him. This, by the way, is not talking about Jesus on the cross.

This is talking about Jesus, Jesus every day. So, you know, He was not, He's basically, His face was not on the cover of GQ. There was nothing, no form, no beauty.

There was so much psychological pressure on Him. Remember when He's in conversation with the Pharisees, and Jesus says, before Abraham was, I am. They say you're not even 50 years old.

Well, we know He's in His 30s, and yet He looks like He's in His 50s, or around there. See, there is this on Him, and when He says there was no form or majesty that we should look at Him, no beauty that we should desire Him, this is not Jesus on the cross. This is Jesus every day.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes, we are healed. So the Messiah will bring salvation for all people, and in the end, tells us that.

Therefore, I will divide Him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet He bore the sin of many and made intercession for transgressors. So the Messiah will bring salvation. The Messiah will be humble and bring salvation.

When Jesus enters Jerusalem in the so-called triumphal entry, the Gospel writers are quoting from Zechariah. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. So here we see that the title of King for Jesus comes into play.

So, in the Old Testament, the term Messiah refers to installing a person in an office in a way that will allow the person to be regarded as accredited by Yahweh. So, the word Messiah comes from mashach, which means to smear or anoint. So, Messiah literally means the anointed one.

In the New Testament, the word Christ, Christos, is the Greek version of the Messiah. So, whenever you have Jesus Christ, that literally is Jesus the Messiah, just as the Greek version of that. So, the verb itself again means to anoint or to smear, coming from the idea of anointing oil that you would usually anoint priests or kings with.

Again, this occurs throughout the Old Testament times, before and after the monarchy. So, the term Messiah, for example, is used four times to refer to priests and Leviticus. Priests were anointed, so they were, in a way, Messiah.

Applied to royal individuals to kings 18 times in 1 and 2 Samuel, and half of these passages have the phrase Mashiach Adonai, the anointed or the Messiah of the Lord, or the Lord's anointed. Of course, two times in Chronicles, five times in the latter Prophets. In the former, Prophets appear 25 times.

All passages speak of the anointing of kings. And again, we said in the latter Prophets five times. Isaiah uses the verb to refer to the anointed one, and Daniel uses the verb to describe the purpose of the 70 weeks, which was to provide time for the anointing of the Most Holy One.

So, in referring to the entire phenomenon of anointing, the acts of designation, selection, or election are included here. So, the anointing of kings, the anointing of the prophets, and the anointing of priests sometimes refer to consecration or to being set apart. Remember, David has the opportunity to kill Saul, and his servants say, hey, you can kill him.

And David says, well, I'm not going to touch the Lord's anointed, meaning the Lord's Messiah. He is set apart. I do not have that authority.

Again, the verb refers to ordain or bestow authority. The elect were assigned specific tasks. Again, kings had the authority to rule.

Moses anointing of Aaron and his sons, appointing them their task as priests, and the authority of prophetic office was seen in the transference of power from Elijah to Elisha. Ultimately, we need to look at Jesus, the Messiah, as the giver of salvation. In the genealogy of Matthew, we are told there are 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile, and 14 from exile to Christ.

And again, the Greek term Christ is the Hebrew Messiah, the anointed one. When Jesus asks his disciples, who do you say that I am? Simon replies, you are the Messiah. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

But again, he did not fully get what he was saying, or he did not really comprehend what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. I think at this time, Peter still thought that Jesus would be the warrior who would come to destroy the Romans because when Jesus told them I am going to go to Jerusalem and die, Peter said, no, that should not happen. And then Jesus says, get behind me, Satan.

What harsh words to say to a guy who just said, you are the Christ of the living, the Son of the living God. Peter did not fully comprehend what this entailed, but he knew that Jesus was the Messiah. In John 4, after the incident with the woman at the well, Jesus says God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.

The woman said, I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, I who speak to you am he.

Some scholars talk about the messianic secret, that Jesus did not know that he was the Messiah and did not tell anybody. Well, these verses contradict that. Jesus knew who he was, and he knew he was the Messiah who came to save us.

Messiah indeed brings salvation, for all have sinned, Paul writes, and have fallen short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace to the redemption that came by the Messiah, Jesus. What's interesting in Romans is that sometimes you have Jesus Christ; sometimes you have Christ Jesus. And sometimes we're

wondering, why is that? Is that just stylistic? Well, it seems like the church in Rome was kind of divided between Jewish believers and Gentile believers, and sometimes Paul says Jesus the Messiah, and sometimes he says the Messiah Jesus.

So, he unites the church through the way he speaks about Jesus. Ultimately, this Messiah gives forgiveness for sin and eternal life. For the wages of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

I'm going to close with this quote by Brevard Childs, who says, For traditional Christianity, the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Messiah of Israel was hardly problematic. Had not an entire Old Testament, beginning with Genesis 3.15, predicted the coming of a King and Savior, which was then fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth? It's a rhetorical question. Of course, he was talking about Jesus.

But not everybody accepts it. When I was in Israel for the first time back in 2005, we had a rabbi come and speak to us, and we had to ask questions. We asked him about Isaiah 53 and if they accepted that Jesus was the Messiah.

And he said, No. He said, Messiah for us is a state of mind, kind of like nirvana. So, it's very interesting because when you reject Jesus as a person, then you have to interpret it in different ways.

So, then we probed further. I said, well, OK, so without the temple, how do you atone for your sins? And he actually sent us to Hosea, Hosea 14, which was a very interesting verse. In Hosea 14:2, it says, Take with you words and return to the Lord.

Say to him, Take away all iniquity, accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. So, he says, Now we atone for our sin with the vows of our lips. Isn't that convenient? No sacrifice, no shedding of blood.

And yet the Bible says without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. Jesus is the Savior. The question is, Is Jesus your Savior? That's the question.

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