



## Teaching the Bible Classically with Dr. Fred Putnam

### Lecture 5: Covenant

#### Outline:

##### Introduction

- Why is this part of the Bible the “boring” part?
  - When people want to read through the Bible in a year, they sometimes get bogged down in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and quit. The topics here feel boring, irrelevant, and that they belong to a different kind of person.
  - This reading is difficult and some laws seem nonsensical.

##### Covenant

- Background
  - The first covenant in the Bible is with Noah and his sons after the flood.
  - God makes a covenant with Abraham.
  - Exodus 19 we find the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant.
    - We wonder, “Why does it look like this?”
    - God chose to use a format that was as familiar to them as certain things are to us (such as a last will, or a wedding).
    - God took a covenant formulary and it comes out of ancient near eastern national law between a great king and the vassal.
      - The Suzerain dictates to the vassal.
      - The Suzerain **identifies** himself by name and then runs through a **history** of their dealings and their relationship.
      - Then there is a list of laws, or the **conditions of the treaty**.
    - The laws begin with the Ten Commandments.
    - Moses reads the stipulations and sprinkles them with blood. This is a symbol to them that their blood will be shed if they break the laws.
    - Moses and 70 of the elders and they have a meal with the God of Israel. The meal seals the covenant and shows that they really are at peace with each other.
  - Blessings & Curses
    - Moses calls heaven and earth to witness against you.



- Heaven and earth are summoned as witnesses to the making and breaking of the covenant.
- Transition will be from Moses to Joshua.
- This follows a program that everyone in Israel would have understood. These laws are the conditions of the covenant.
  - The laws begin with the law of circumcision.
  - The other laws are about (for example) the establishment of justice, the widow, the sojourner, diet, health, marriage, capital punishment, manslaughter, murder, parents, children, the king, and prophets.
  - These laws are to safeguard Israel from assimilation with their neighbors.
- In the third century, Rabbi Simlai counted 613 laws.
  - 365 negative
  - 248 positive
  - This has been debated ever since.
- There are two kinds of laws.
  - Apodictic Laws
  - Case Laws

## Asking Questions

- Choose a law that you find interesting.
  - What is required by this law? What does this law forbid?
  - What is the point? What is this law trying to preserve?
  - What value does it suggest? What is important in our lives?
  - If we were to obey this law today, what would it look like?
  - Could this law translate into our culture? How could it translate?
- What does it mean to be obedient to a law that you can no longer obey?
- Help students imagine living in a world that needed laws like these, the things that make up the ordinary parts of life.
- Work through what is involved in the sacrifice step by step. The process produces an awful stench. Why does God find this pleasing?