



The Great Themes of Scripture

1. Covenant. God's Promises Are Forever

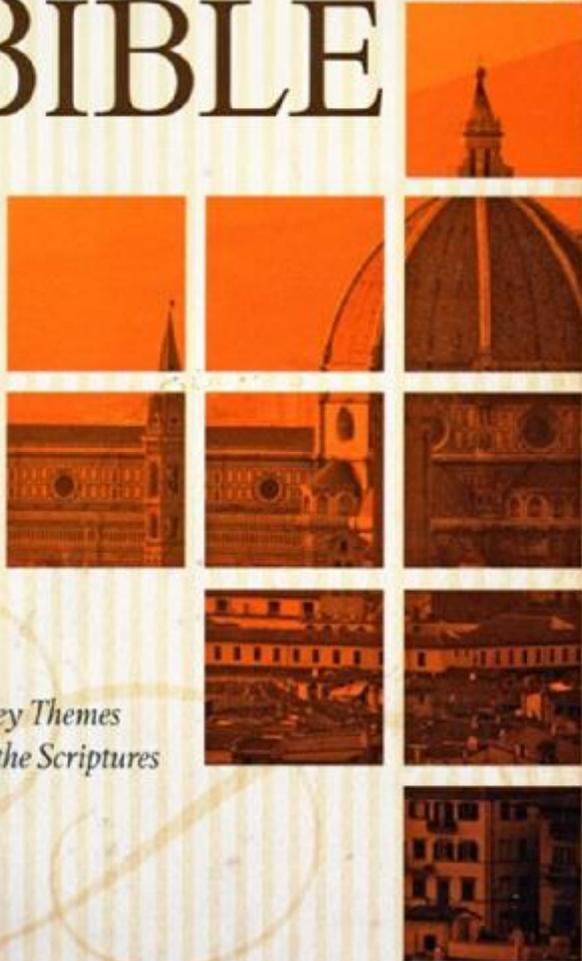
Sunday, October 3, 2010

10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor

Presenter: David Monyak

St. John in the Wilderness

MAKING SENSE
of the BIBLE



*A Study of 10 Key Themes
Traced Through the Scriptures*

H. H. Drake Williams III

Primary Reference

- **Making Sense of the Bible. A Study of 10 Key Themes Traced Through the Scriptures.** H.H. Drake Williams III, 2006. Chapter 2. Covenant: God's Promises are Forever

W. EUGENE MARCH



VOLUME 1
Great Themes
of the Bible

Secondary Reference

- **Great Themes of the Bible, Volume 1,** W. Eugene March, 2007. Chapter 2 “Covenant”

Great Themes of Scripture

- **October 3:** Covenant. God's Promises are Forever
- **October 10:** The Messiah. Unto Us a Child is Born
- **October 17:** Law. Regulating the Good Life
- **October 24:** Salvation. Amazing Grace!
- **October 31:** The People of God. A Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting.

Collect for the First Sunday after the Epiphany:
The Baptism of our Lord, Book of Common Prayer, p. 214

This Week:

**1. Covenant. God's
Promises Are Forever**

A painting of Moses, an elderly man with a long white beard, wearing a blue robe and a red sash. He is holding a large, rectangular stone tablet with Hebrew text written on it. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky. The title 'Introduction: The Covenant Between God and Us' is overlaid in large, bold, yellow text.

Introduction: The Covenant Between God and Us

The Old Covenant is revealed in
the New, and the New Covenant is
veiled in the Old.

—Saint Augustine

Introduction

The Covenant Between God and Us

- Many Christians are unaware that a covenant exists between God and Us.
- Yet the reality of our covenant with God is one of the most significant truths expressed in Scripture:
 - The term “covenant” appears more than three hundred times in some versions of the Bible
 - Used nearly thirty times in the New Testament, including the Last Supper

What is a Covenant?



What is a Covenant?

Dictionary Definition

- Standard English dictionary definition:
 - “an agreement, usually a formal agreement between two or more persons”
- Synonyms:
 - pact, treaty, or contract
- derived from the Latin *convenire* via the Old French *convenir*, essentially means a “coming together,” a “solemn agreement.”

What is a Covenant?

Biblical Definition

- However covenant in the original languages of the Bible conveys an intensified sense of “commitment,” over and above that which might be found in a simple “agreement.”
- “covenant:” Hebrew *berith*. Root words for *berith*:
 - A Hebrew word meaning “to eat bread with” (in ancient times a sign of commitment, estimating a sense of intimacy)
 - Akkadian preposition *berit*, meaning “between.”
 - *berit* may also be derived from an Akkadian word that means “bond” or “fetter”

What is a Covenant?

Biblical Definition

- Idea of covenant also sometimes connected with the Hebrew word *hesed*, meaning “steadfast love” or “loyal love,” regularly used to describe God's devotion and commitment to his people.
- In the Greek New Testament, covenant is *diatheke*, meaning “settlement,” “treaty,” “will,” or “testament.”

What is a Covenant?

Working Definition

- A working definition: a formal agreement between two parties characterized by dedication and commitment.

A classical painting depicting Moses, an elderly man with a long white beard, wearing a blue robe and a red cloak. He is shown from the chest up, holding a large, rectangular stone tablet with Hebrew text. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky. The title 'Significance of God's Covenants' is written in large, bold, yellow letters across the center of the image.

Significance of God's Covenants

Significance of Covenants

Covenants in the Bible

- We will look today at several covenants in the Bible:
 - 1. the covenant with Noah
 - 2. the covenant with Abraham
 - 3. the covenant with Moses
 - 4. the covenant with David
 - 5. the new covenant prophesized by Jeremiah, initiated by Jesus

Significance of Covenants

God's Desire for Relationship with Us

- The fact that God seeks to establish covenants with human beings indicates clearly the divine desire for a relationship with God's People.
- If the relationship is not working, God tries again ... and again, making a new covenant.
- The series of covenants we find in the Bible is thus testimony to the God's deep, ongoing commitment to and love for humankind, seeking again and again relationship with God's people.

A painting depicting Noah, an elderly man with a long white beard, wearing a dark blue robe and a red shawl. He is holding a large, vertical scroll with Hebrew text. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky. The text on the scroll is partially legible, including words like "לְכָל הַחַיָּוִי", "לְכָל הַבְּהֵמָה", "לְכָל הַרֶגֶט", "לְכָל הַצֹּמֵחַ", "לְכָל הַיְצֵאֵי אֶרֶץ", "לְכָל הַיְצֵאֵי הַיָּם", "לְכָל הַיְצֵאֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם", "לְכָל הַיְצֵאֵי הַיַּבֵּשׁ", "לְכָל הַיְצֵאֵי הַיָּם", "לְכָל הַיְצֵאֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם", "לְכָל הַיְצֵאֵי הַיַּבֵּשׁ".

God's Covenant with Noah

Covenant with Noah

Setting

- Setting:
 - Divine punishment in the form of a great flood fell upon the peoples of the earth because of their great wickedness (Genesis 6:1-7)
 - In grace, God preserves a remnant of life from destruction and directs a righteous man Noah and his family to build a boat to save himself and his family and representatives of every living kind. (Genesis 6:8-22)

Covenant with Noah

The Covenant

- After the great flood comes to an end, God makes a covenant with Noah and all living things:
 - Genesis 9:8-17 ⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you— every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ... *continued next slide* ...

Covenant with Noah

The Covenant

- Genesis 9:8-17 *continued*: ¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” ¹⁷ So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.” (NIV)

Covenant with Noah

Elements of Biblical Covenants

- Some important elements of biblical covenants:
- **Promise** is made by God
 - (never again to flood the world)
- a **Sacrifice** is offered
 - (Noah offers a sacrifice in Genesis 8:20 just before the covenant is instituted)
- a **Sign** to remember the covenant
 - (the sign of the rainbow)

Covenant with Noah

Elements of Biblical Covenants

- The sign of the rainbow is our assurance that God's agreement with Noah is still in effect.

A painting of Moses, an elderly man with a long white beard, wearing a blue robe and a red sash. He is holding a large, rectangular stone tablet with Hebrew text written on it. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky. The title "God's Covenant with Abraham" is overlaid in large, bold, yellow text across the center of the image.

God's Covenant with Abraham

Covenant with Abraham

Introduction

- The next covenant found in the Old Testament is that between God and Abraham (Genesis 15, 17)
- Setting:
 - At the time God calls Abraham, he has neither land nor children (Genesis 12).
 - He is seventy-five years old and his wife in her late sixties.
- The covenant includes the same three elements found in his covenant with Noah — a **promise**, a **sacrifice**, and a **sign**

Covenant with Abraham

Promise

■ Promise

- The promise is threefold: he would have a large family, receive land, and become a blessing to others (Genesis 12:1-3). (seed, land, and blessing):
- Genesis 12:1-3: **The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (NIV)**
- This divine promise is found repeatedly through the book of Genesis: 13:15-17; 15:5, 7, 18-21; 17:2-8; 22:17-18; 24:60; 26:2-4; 28:3-4, 13-15

Covenant with Abraham

Sacrifice

■ Sacrifice

- Before God initiates the covenant, Abraham brings a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove, and a pigeon to be slaughtered. He cuts them in two and arranges them opposite each other (he does not divide the birds in two, but kills them and lays them opposite each other)
- When God ratified the covenant, he was in effect saying to Abraham, “May I be made like these animals if I do not fulfill the demands of the covenant.”

Covenant with Abraham

Sign

■ Sign

- the sign of circumcision:
- Genesis 17:10-14 ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner— those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. (NIV)

Covenant with Abraham

Other Elements of the Covenant

- The covenant with Abraham also includes two other elements we will find in other biblical covenants:
- **Obligations or Commands** God's people must follow
 - Circumcision is commanded
- **God introduces God's Self** before the covenant, describing himself and declaring his character:
 - Genesis 15:1: **“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”** (NIV)
 - Genesis 17:1: **“I am God almighty, walk before me and be blameless.”** (NIV)

Covenant with Abraham

Elements in Biblical Covenants

- **God introduces God's Self** before the covenant, describing himself and declaring his character.
- **Promise** is made by God
- a **Sacrifice** offered
- a **Sign** given to remind the parties of the covenant
- **Obligations or Commands** God's people must follow

A classical painting depicting Moses, an elderly man with a long white beard, wearing a dark blue robe and a red cloak. He is shown from the chest up, holding a large, rectangular stone tablet inscribed with Hebrew text. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky. The title 'God's Covenant with Moses' is written in large, bold, yellow letters across the center of the image.

God's Covenant with Moses

Covenant with Moses

Introduction

- The next covenant found in the Old Testament is that of God with Moses, enacted at Mount Sinai following the Exodus from Egypt.

Covenant with Moses

God Introduces God's Self

- **God introduces God's Self** before the covenant, describing himself and declaring his character:
 - Exodus 20:2-6 ² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³ You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand *generations* of those who love me and keep my commandments. (NIV)

Covenant with Moses

Promises

- **Promises.** God promises the Israelites in Exodus 19:5-6: **“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”**

Covenant with Moses

Sacrifice

- **Sacrifice.** In Exodus 24:4-8:
 - Moses erects an altar at the foot of the mountain and sets up twelve stone pillars, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - After sacrificing several young bulls, he reads the laws and promises of the covenant.
 - All of Israel then verbally agrees, saying, **“We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey”** (v. 7).
 - Moses then takes the blood of the bulls and sprinkles it on the people, representing all of Israel as taking part in these sacrifices before the Lord.

Covenant with Moses

Sign

- **Sign.** God declares a sign that the covenant is in effect:
 - Exodus 31:12-17 ¹² Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹³ “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy. ¹⁴ Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. ¹⁵ For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. ¹⁶ The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. ¹⁷ It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.’” (NIV)

Covenant with Moses

Obligations, Commands

■ Obligations and Commands.

- The Ten Commandments
- Other obligations and commandments regarding servants, physical injuries, theft, property damage, honesty, civil and religious observations, Sabbaths, feasts, and the conquest of the Promised Land: (Exod. 21:1-23:33).
- If God's people keep these laws, their relationship with God will be positive.

Covenant with Moses

Renewal of the Covenant

- The Covenant had to be renewed many times throughout Israel's history because the people persisted in making partial commitments to God:
 - renewed after the people of Israel sinned by worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 34).
 - renewed again on the plains of Moab after the Israelites had wandered in the desert for forty years (Deuteronomy 29).
 - revived at Shechem in the days of Joshua (Joshua 24).
 - various kings also renewed the covenant—King Jeohoiada (2 Kings 11), King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29), and King Josiah (2 Kings 23)

Covenant with David

God Proposes a Covenant with David

- King David is the second king of the United Kingdom of Israel
 - Born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judah. His father was Jesse
 - Ruled around 1000 B.C.
 - The United Kingdom of Israel comprised what would later split into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah
- In 2 Samuel 7, David proposes to build a house for the Lord. Although David dwells in a great palace, God's presence in the ark of the Mosaic covenant remains in a tent (v. 2).

Covenant with David

God Proposes a Covenant with David

- Instead, God (in a dream to Nathan) proposes a covenant with David in which he promises to build a “house” (a dynasty) for David: 2 Samuel 7:8-16
- 2 Samuel 7:8-16 **tell my servant David, “This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹¹ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. (continued next slide ...)**

Covenant with David

God Proposes a Covenant with David

- 2 Samuel 7:8-16 I will also give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. ¹⁵ But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. (NIV)

Covenant with David

God Introduces God's Self

- **God introduces God's Self** before the covenant, describing himself and declaring his character:
 - **2 Samuel 7:8-9: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you.**
(NIV)

Covenant with David

Promises

- **Promises.** God promises:
 - a great name for David,
 - a place for God's people Israel, free from oppression by wicked people,
 - rest from his enemies,
 - his house and kingdom will endure forever.

Covenant with David

Other Elements

- Elements of Covenants not present here:
 - **Obligations or Commandments** for the people to follow
 - A **Sign**
- The lack of a sign, and similarities between this covenant and the covenant made with Abraham, have caused some to suggest God's covenant with David is best viewed as a continuation and expansion of his covenant with Abraham.

Covenant with David

The End of David's Dynasty?

- In **597 B.C.** and again in **587 B.C.**, Babylonian armies ravaged the **Southern Kingdom of Judah**, seeming to end the dynasty of King David.
 - **Zerubbabel**, the last direct descendant of David, ruled from 520-515 B.C. as the Persian governor of Judea, then a Persian province fashioned from the conquered Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Covenant with David

The Messiah

- However belief arose that a **Messiah**, a descendent of David, would someday inaugurate a messianic age in which the full intention of God's reign would be realized.
- The prophet Isaiah wrote: Isaiah 11:1-3 **A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.**
(NIV)

Covenant with David

Jesus the Messiah

- The gospels tell us **Jesus of Nazareth** was recognized and proclaimed as this “**Christ**” = the “**Anointed**” = the “**Messiah**,” the long hoped for “**son of David**” (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38)

A painting of the prophet Jeremiah, depicted as an elderly man with a long, white beard and hair. He is wearing a dark blue or black robe with a bright red sash or cloak draped over his shoulders. He is holding a large, rectangular scroll with Hebrew text written on it. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky in shades of blue and grey. The overall style is characteristic of Baroque or Neoclassical religious art.

The Promise of a New Covenant in Jeremiah

The New Covenant

Jeremiah

- The prophet **Jeremiah** interpreted the ravaging of Judah by Babylonian armies in 597 and 587 B.C. as the divine judgment against the Israelites (Jeremiah 28-29; 37-40) for disregarding the commandments, breaking their covenant with God (Jeremiah 2:27; 7:1-15).
- His prophecies were so gloomy that he is often called “**the weeping prophet**” or the “**prophet of loneliness**”

The New Covenant

Jeremiah

- Then, as his countrymen were being deported to Babylon because of their disobedience to God, **Jeremiah** wrote of the promise of a **new covenant**: Jeremiah 31:31-34

The New Covenant

Jeremiah

- Jeremiah 31:31-34 ³¹ “The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (NIV)

The New Covenant

New Features

- There are a number of new features in this promised **new covenant**:
 - 1. God will put his law in the people's minds and write it on their hearts.
 - 2. God will completely forgive the people's sins.
 - 3. A new intimacy of relationship with God. God's people will know him, from the least of them to the greatest.



The New Covenant in the New Testament

Covenant in the New Testament

The New Covenant in the Gospels

- At the Last Supper, Jesus presents the cup to his disciples, and says: **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me”** (Luke 22:20; cf. Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24)

Covenant in the New Testament

God Introduces God's Self

- **God introduces God's Self** before the covenant, describing himself and declaring his character:
 - Jesus – God incarnate – has been presenting himself to his disciples for three years in his public ministry before the Last Supper

Covenant in the New Testament

Promises

- **Promises.** Among the promises made by Jesus is the promise of the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28) – the foundation of the **new covenant** with **Jeremiah**.

Covenant in the New Testament

Sacrifice

- **Sacrifice.** Jesus sealed the new covenant with a sacrifice, his own sacrifice.

Covenant in the New Testament

Sign

- **Sign.** The new covenant has a distinguishing sign, the eating of a meal.
- This sign is to be enacted regularly among Christ's followers to remind them of the new covenant relationship that now exists between them and God (cf. 1 Corinthians. 11:23-26)

Covenant in the New Testament

Obligations, Commands

- **Obligations, Commands.** Jesus gave his disciples a significant number of commands during his public ministry.

Covenant in the New Testament

The New Covenant in Paul

- Paul (writing earlier than the Gospel writers) also remembers the institution of the Lord's Supper as involving the words of Jeremiah, with Jesus explicitly describing the cup as the **“new covenant in my blood”**

Covenant in the New Testament

The New Covenant in Paul

- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 ²³ The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the **new covenant** in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (NIV)

Covenant in the New Testament

The New Covenant in Paul

- Paul makes other allusions to Jeremiah, such as 2 Corinthians 3:3: **“You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”**
- *Compare:* Jeremiah 31:33: **“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”**

Covenant in the New Testament

The New Covenant in Hebrews

- In Hebrews, we find the highest concentration of covenant ideas in the New Testament.
- “covenant” is used sixteen times, and the letter ends with a benediction that mentions the word covenant (Hebrews 13:20)

Covenant in the New Testament

The New Covenant in Hebrews

- Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant is quoted *twice* in the book of Hebrews in describing the new covenant of Jesus:
 - Hebrews 8:8-12
 - Hebrews 10:16-17



Summary and Conclusions

Summary

- In the Old and New Testament, God is portrayed as eager to engage and commit to lasting, enriching relationships with undeserving and often unfaithful human beings.
- When a the relationship was not working, God would try again ... and again.

Summary

- As Christians, we are in a **covenantal relationship** with God
- This **new covenant** was first prophesied by Jeremiah: “I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, ... because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Summary

- Our **obligations** under the covenant are to follow the teachings of Jesus.
- We are **promised** under the covenant the forgiveness of our sins and a life everlasting as the People of God.
- We remember this covenant in its **sign**: the Eucharistic meal we celebrate together.

A religious painting depicting Jesus Christ standing in a blue robe, surrounded by a group of people in a forest setting. The text is overlaid on the image.

Next Time (October 10):
**2. Messiah. Unto Us a
Child is Born**