

The Covenant in the Book of Matthew

*Covenant*¹

The title of this study on the Sermon on the Mount, *The Stipulations of the New Covenant*, requires an explanation. Immediately, you see that the Sermon on the Mount is in some way related to the covenants mentioned so often in the Old Testament. So, we need to talk about covenants. What's a covenant, you say? Let's look.

How Can We Be in a Relationship with God?

By means of a covenant. There are two major ways to do this. One, our relationship can be based on a divine essence common to both God and man. As such, in some sense, we are god or at least god-like and can therefore relate to him on this high and elevated level. Two, but if we are not actually god and in fact are sinners, what would be the basis of a relationship with God? As fallen creatures, the basis of our relationship with God is by means of a peace treaty called a covenant. Let's flesh this out a bit.

By Essence

"In pagan religions and philosophies, human beings were often seen, at least in their spiritual or intellectual aspect, as a spark of the divine essence. Quite often a particular race was identified with the divinity, and the king was seen as an incarnation of a divine figure.

The case was, of course, quite different for Israel. The sovereign God, creator, and lord of all things, was utterly distinct from his creation. No part of God's nature or knowledge coincided with the creature at any point. That is to say; God is transcendent². Therefore, any relationship that one might have with this God would have to be something other than a *natural* relationship—that is, the relationship could not be explained in terms of, say, a common spiritual essence shared by the Creator and a creature."³ So, what would that be?

By Covenant

The human race is in a relationship with God, not because it shared his nature—people are in no part, God; they are in a relationship with God by means of a pact, an agreement, a compact, a promise, a treaty—a covenant! It is in this way that God communicates with us, holding us accountable to obedience to his law and revealing to us his mercy by grace.

It is God that initiates these covenants and enters into them with his creation; he does so by means of mutual commitments, solemn oaths and grave ceremonies. It is by these covenants that we have a relationship with God, not by any common essence that we share with God for we share none.

What covenants or agreements has God made with the human race? Let's start at the beginning; there are three covenants that outline the relationship God has with his creation; 1) The Covenant of Redemption, 2) the Covenant of Creation (Works) and the Covenant of Grace (Promise). Let's take a look at these and see their implications for our lives.

The Covenant of Redemption

Our starting place here is in eternity before anything was created. It is in eternity past that God determined to create and it is in eternity past that he fixed his affection on a special part of that creation—man. This was done by means of a covenant called the covenant of redemption. This was a covenant

¹ As we briefly discuss covenant theology, I would like to recommend Michael Horton's, *Introducing Covenant Theology* as a first rate source for information on this subject.

² Transcendent...

1. Surpassing others; preeminent or supreme.

2. Lying beyond the ordinary range of perception....

3. Being above and independent of the material universe.

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/transcendent>

³ Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 29.

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between the members of the Trinity, man was not a party to this covenant—he had not been created yet! In this covenant, “The Father elects a people in the Son as their mediator to be brought to saving faith through the Spirit. Thus, this covenant made by the Trinity in eternity already takes the fall of the human race into account. Chosen out of the condemned mass of humanity, the elect are no better or no more qualified than the rest. God has simply chosen according to his own freedom to display both his justice and his mercy, and the covenant of redemption is the opening act in this drama of redemption.”⁴

The certainty of this eternal covenant is revealed in Scripture:

“even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love” (Ephesians 1:4, ESV)

“...who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,” (2 Timothy 1:9, ESV)

“This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”” (Matthew 13:35, ESV)

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matthew 25:34, ESV)

“*Before the foundation of the world*” and “*before the ages began*” make it clear that our salvation was determined even before the creation of the earth itself. It was not an after-thought, it was a before-thought, a covenant whereby God in Trinity determined to redeem; hence, a covenant of redemption.

The Covenant of Creation or Works

This is the first covenant God made with the human race and is found in Genesis 1 and 2. In the covenant of works, life and land (the Garden) are promised to Adam, and through him to his posterity, upon the condition of perfect and personal obedience.

The parties to this covenant of works are God and Adam, and it is based on God’s law. Man is instructed in that law:

“but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” (Genesis 3:3, ESV)

The condition that Adam must meet for life and an eternal inheritance is perfect obedience. But Adam violated this covenant of works by eating the forbidden fruit. In doing so, he plunged himself and all of his posterity into rebellion against God. Adam is therefore expelled from the land, the Garden, and earns for himself eternal damnation.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:16–17, ESV)

Though the book of Genesis does not call the relationship between God and Adam a covenant, Hosea 6:7 does so and thereby makes explicitly clear what is implicitly so when it says, “*But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me.*”

The Covenant of Grace (Promise)

Immediately upon the failure of man to keep the covenant of works in the Garden of Eden, God instituted the covenant of grace, sometimes called the covenant of promise. We see this when God says to Satan:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15, ESV)

⁴ Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 78–79.

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This was followed immediately by the introduction of the sacrificial system that covered man's sin with blood.

"And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them."
(Genesis 3:21, ESV)

This is later confirmed in the sacrifices of Cain and Able.

"In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering," (Genesis 4:3–4, ESV)

This covenant of promise is not a do this and live covenant, that is, a conditional covenant, like the covenant of works, it is an unconditional promise of salvation based on what God will do, not what man will do.

The Two Covenants

These two covenants, the covenant of works or creation and the covenant of grace or promise continue through history until they are united in Jesus at Calvary in the New Covenant.

The covenant of works is expanded by the Mosaic covenant and continues till consummated and united with the New Covenant in Jesus. This covenant is what is sometimes called a land-grant covenant, and in this sense, it is similar to the covenant in the Garden. Obeying the covenant of works in the Garden allows them to stay in the Garden, violating it, results in expulsion from the land. So, Israel must do all that is written in the Mosaic covenant to stay in the land; but having failed to keep the covenant, Israel is expelled from the land. The covenant of works says, "do this and live."

However, the covenant of grace is followed and expanded by the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant and on to its final form in the New Covenant. The covenant of promise says, "because God did this, we live."

Although these two covenants continue through the history of Israel, we want to give special attention in this study to the Mosaic covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant

As a result of some critical work in recent years, new elements in the structure of the Mosaic covenant have become clearer. We have come to realize that in many ways this covenant is *essentially a peace treaty between unequal parties*.

First formed at Mount Sinai, the Mosaic covenant must from time to time be renewed. It was first renewed in the Book of Deuteronomy forty years after it was first given on Sinai; its last renewal is found in Matthew's gospel which is God's last formal renewal of this covenant, this peace treaty, with Israel—a covenant that started all the way back in the Garden of Eden.

The Book of Matthew describes the last renewal of this covenant and at the same time the establishment of the New Covenant. And here is an important point for our study: The Sermon on the Mount is the stipulations of this New Covenant as the Ten Commandments were the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. This will be the last covenant God will ever make with his people. This New Covenant will be consummated in at the Passover and Jesus' crucifixion. The Book of Matthew is about a new and greater Moses, Jesus Christ, whose life corresponds to Moses' life and ministry, and this new and greater covenant, which accomplishes what the Mosaic covenant could only foreshadow.

Organic to this peace treaty are stipulations, which are the terms, or behaviors required by the sovereign party, the great king, of his vassals—you and me. The Sermon on the Mount plays this role in the New Covenant as the Ten Commandments did in the Old; it describes the behaviors, terms or stipulations which the great king Jesus Christ requires of those in covenant with him, Christians.

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The Origin of Covenants in the Ancient Near East

Since the heart of what we are talking about here is a treaty, we should consider where this treaty format, called a covenant, came from; what are its origin and history?

Breakthrough insight into the origin and role of the covenant in the ancient Near East were the contributions of Drs. George E. Mendenhall⁵ and Meredith G. Kline.⁶ In their books, they showed that the form of the Mosaic law, the language of the text, the historical prologue, the requirement of an exclusive commitment to the suzerain (the Lord of the Covenant), the pronouncement of imprecations⁷ and benedictions,⁸ and more, all point to the law as a treaty established by God with His people. Hittite treaties common to that era were the models used in the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant. Indeed, “the revelation committed to the two tables was rather a suzerainty treaty (peace treaty) or covenant than a legal code.”⁹

This treaty or covenant format has its specific origins in the Syro-Hittite age of the ancient near east. The French have given us a word that expresses the type of government the Hittites used in that era. They call it a suzerain and define this as “A nation that controls another nation in international affairs but allows it domestic sovereignty.”¹⁰ This is not unlike the hegemony¹¹ practiced by many nations over the millennia even until our day. The Hittites were a powerful kingdom that existed in what is today central Turkey and Syria from around 1680 BC to about 1180 BC. In foreign affairs, they entered into treaties with the nations around them, controlling the external affairs of these countries. Their treaty format became a typical pattern for many of the countries of the Near East. As led by God, Moses used this format in the Mosaic covenant; it also has many characteristics in common with the covenants with Noah and Abraham before him.

The Structure of the Ancient Near Eastern Covenant

Let’s look at the elements or parts of a typical suzerainty treaty from that era and note its similarity with the Mosaic treaty of God with Israel, commonly called the Ten Commandments.

The first element found in a suzerainty treaty is *the identification of the covenant giver*, the great king. This answers the question “with whom am I entering into this treaty?” This relationship, the one of a vassal¹² to a King, was an exclusive one; the vassal could not engage in a treaty or other relationships with other monarchs without being guilty of treason.

In like manner in the Bible, such an *identification of the covenant giver* is found at Exod. 20:2, which reads simply: “*I am the Lord your God....*”

⁵ George E. Mendenhall (August 13, 1916 – August 5, 2016) was an American Biblical scholar who taught at the University of Michigan's Department of Near Eastern Studies. Mendenhall graduated from Midland College in Nebraska in 1936, and from Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg in 1938. Mendenhall was first an ordained Lutheran minister, and during World War II he served as an intelligence officer in the United States Navy. After the war, Mendenhall obtained a Ph.D. in Semitic languages from Johns Hopkins University and began a career in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical studies as well as related archeology. He was professor at the University of Michigan from 1952 to 1986. The University of Michigan honored Mendenhall by creating the "George E. Mendenhall Professor Emeritus of Ancient and Biblical Studies".

⁶ Meredith G. Kline (1922-2007). Kline was an influential voice for Covenant theology in the Reformed tradition. He is perhaps best known for his important contributions in the area of Suzerain-Vassal treaties in the 2nd millennium BC. Kline received a B.A., Gordon College; Th.B., Th.M., Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia (1947), and a Ph.D. in Assyriology and Egyptology from Dropsie University (1956). He was an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and had a long career as Professor of Old Testament at various institutions, including Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia; Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; and Westminster Seminary California.

⁷ Curses

⁸ Blessings

⁹ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law, Volume One* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973), 7.

¹⁰ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/suzerain>

¹¹ “...leadership or predominant influence exercised by one nation over others, as in a confederation.”

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/hegemony>

¹² “...a person granted the use of land, in return for rendering homage, fealty, and usually military service or its equivalent to a lord or other superior....” <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/vassal>

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The second element is *the historical prologue*. This section recounts the monarch's past deeds that benefited the vassal, deeds that comprise the foundation of the vassal's obligation to that monarch. Thus, at the heart of the Hittite treaty form, represented also in the Israelite notion of covenant, stands the idea of reciprocity. Because the monarch/deity has done this for you, you are to be subject to that monarch's/deity's demands, outlined in terms of this treaty.

The continuation of Exod. 20:2 presents exactly such a *historical prologue*: "... *who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*" That is their shared history; this is what the great king did for Israel.

The third element is the *stipulations or the requirements*; these are the specific terms of the covenant, which the deity/monarch expects of the vassal in return for past protection and to assure future harmonious relationships.

Thus Exod. 20:2 continues with the *stipulation or requirement* saying, "*You shall have no other gods before me,*" followed by the rest of the Ten Commandments as well as the remainder of the covenantal law found in the Book of Exodus. So, the stipulations are the laws that the vassal must obey to be in a harmonious relationship with the great king.

The fourth element is *the declaration of sanctions or the blessings and curses* that detail the rewards or punishments that will result from obedience or disobedience to the terms of the covenant. The blessings and curses of the Sinaitic covenant are elaborated in exceptional detail in Deuteronomy chapter 28.

"And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God." ... "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you." (Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15, ESV)

The fifth element is the *ratification ceremony*, through which the treaty is formally adopted and made binding on both parties. This always consisted of the sacrifice of an animal. "In Exodus, two *ratification* elements are present, the people's verbal agreement to the covenant (Exod. 19:8 and 24:3: "*All that the Lord has spoken we will do*") and the sacrificial ritual during which, in association with Moses' public reading of the covenant law, the blood of a sacrifice is tossed upon the people and the altar (Exod. 24:4–8), thereby binding the people to the deity with whom the covenant has been made."¹³

The Suzerainty Treaty or New Covenant in Matthew

We now come to the Book of Matthew. These same elements found in ancient near-eastern covenants and the Mosaic covenant are also found in Matthew, demonstrating that this book is a covenant document—a covenant renewal. "The structural correspondences that have been noted between the gospels and Exodus are not peripheral but fundamental."¹⁴ As a result, "Jesus and his work are contemplated in the gospels from a perspective that is primarily and pervasively covenantal."¹⁵ This covenant structure is particularly the case with Matthew, the Gospel written to the Jews—to whom God is in covenant.

Do these elements of a covenant appear in the Gospel of Matthew? Let's see:

Preamble: The Covenant Mediator (Matthew 1:1-2:12)

A covenant was a top-down treaty in which a greater king imposed the terms of a treaty upon another. In a treaty document, the great king of the covenant is identified in the preamble, which in the Old Testament "is the revelation of the name of God as Lord of the covenant."¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., 137–138.

¹⁴ Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Second Edition.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 179–180.

¹⁵ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 182.

¹⁶ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 199.

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Following this pattern from the suzerainty treaties of the ancient world and the Mosaic treaties in Exodus and Deuteronomy, we note similar elements in Matthew with the king introduced in his infancy, which is what we find in the birth of Jesus. “Birth narratives are prominent in the introductions to the accounts of the old and new mediators (Exod. 2:1ff.; Matt. 1:18ff.; Lk. 1:5ff.)”¹⁷ These passages make this abundantly clear.

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” (Matthew 2:6, ESV)

“And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11, ESV)

In this way, the great king of the covenant is identified in the preamble of Matthew.

Historical Prologue: (Matthew 2:13-4:25)

“The earlier life of both Moses and Jesus remains largely hidden from view. But in each case, an episode is disclosed that was indicative of the future deliverer’s sense of vocation and the failure of others to understand the divine purpose (Exod. 2:11ff.; cf. Acts 7:25; Heb. 11:24ff.; Lk. 2:41ff.). The hidden years of preparation issue in both cases in acts of commissioning, attended by special manifestations of God (Exod. 3:1ff.; Matt. 3:16f.; Mk. 1:10f.; Lk. 3:21f.; Jn. 1:32f.)”¹⁸

Looking again at Matthew 2:13-23, we are reminded of what the great king did by means of Jesus’ flight to Egypt (2:13-15), the attempt of a new Pharaoh to murder the greater son of Moses (2:16-18), and by Jesus’ return to the Promised Land (2:19-22).

“...This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”” (Matthew 2:15, ESV)

These stories of Moses and Jesus are “set within the international political scene of the day and in particular, are related to royal decrees that are directed against the life of Israelite infants and thus threaten the destined deliverer of God’s people....”¹⁹

Incidents in Moses’ life have counterparts in Jesus’ life. Consider Moses’ baptism in the Red Sea with Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:1-17) and the temptation of Israel in the wilderness with Jesus’ temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). These events in Moses’ life are followed by his mountaintop experience of giving the law at Mount Sinai. “The very topography of the Israelites’ journey brings into high relief the ascending literary movement of the book as they proceed from the river valley of Egypt through the depths of the sea, thence along the rising terrain to the heights of Sinai, the lofty setting of the covenant consummation of Exodus 19–40.”²⁰ Jesus in like manner goes up to a mountain and proclaims the law, the Sermon on the Mount.

The Stipulations: The Terms of the Covenant (Matthew 5-7)

Moses was a ruler and lawgiver in Israel, and so is Jesus. “Under the heading of Jesus as ruler, his office as mediatorial representative of God before men comes into consideration. In this capacity, he inaugurated the covenant and founded the kingdom, organizing the community of faith and promulgating the law of its life and order.”²¹

In Matthew 5, the new Moses ascends the mountain and again gives the law. As a result, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, we have the terms of the covenant or the duties or behavior required by the great king that justifies not only his past protection but assures a future harmonious relationship with his

¹⁷ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 187.

¹⁸ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 188.

¹⁹ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 188.

²⁰ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 178.

²¹ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 190.

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people. This element is the heart of our study in the Sermon on the Mount. *These are the stipulations of the new covenant.*

A Declaration of Sanctions: (Matthew 8-25)

The declaration of sanctions consists of two parts, blessings, and curses. At the beginning of the Sermon, we see the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-10) which are a supreme example of God's blessings on those who respond to kingdom life. At the end of the sermon, we see curses on those who ignore the call of the covenant illustrated in the two gates, the two prophets, the two trees, the two claims and the two foundations found in Matthew 7:13-27.

Throughout Matthew, the blessings and curses of the covenant are often discussed in proximity to the other. Jesus' physical healings and material blessings in the feeding of multitudes are central to his ministry. Like Moses, Jesus led his followers, supplying their physical needs, going on before them to the promised rest (Jn. 14:2f.; cf. Matt. 26:32; 28:7).²² The purpose of these blessings is to present Jesus to Israel as the covenant King, Lord of his people. In his teachings and miracles, they are to recognize the promised Messiah and respond with repentance and faith.

"And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." (Matthew 4:23, ESV)

However, chapters 23-25 increasingly bring the curses of the covenant to the forefront.

"Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." (Matthew 24:1-2, ESV)

In Luke's version of this sermon, Jesus says:

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near." (Luke 21:20, ESV)

In Matthew 24 and 25, the curses of the covenant fully embrace the judgments of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26.

Ratification Ceremony: (Matthew 26-28)

In Exodus, we read that ratification took place with the blood of the covenant, and in Matthew, "the controlling and cohesive motif of the passion narratives is the ratification of the new covenant."²³ First, we see the story unfold in Exodus.

*"And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the **blood of the covenant** that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Exodus 24:4-8, ESV)*

In Matthew, as well, it is the blood of the covenant that establishes the new covenant. "...the underlying theme of the passion narratives in the gospels is precisely that of their Exodus counterpart...."²⁴

²² Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 189-190.

²³ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 195.

²⁴ Ibid., Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 178.

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*“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is my **blood of the covenant**, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’” (Matthew 26:26–29, ESV)*

“Like the old covenant at Sinai, the new one is sealed with a meal and blood ritual. Christians are one family with God, sharing one life. And like the old, this new covenant manifests itself in the new life the Christian should lead. Like Moses on Mt. Sinai, Jesus, on a mountain, gives a new covenant law (Matthew 5–7). Jesus’ teachings, example, and life are the commandments of the new covenant (John 15:12; 13:14–15, 34). For Christians, the promise of the Mosaic covenant has become a reality in Christ.”²⁵

In Matthew 26-28, we will see the symbols given in the Lord’s Supper of what will soon occur in Jesus’ life. The “covenantal orientation of the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ as presented in these narratives is evidenced by explicitly covenantal terminology and, less directly but nonetheless most effectively, by the gospels’ extensive appropriation of the Exodus-Sinai experiences of Israel as a typological model in the delineation of the Messianic history.”²⁶

The Call to Covenant Renewal

A call by the prophets to covenant renewal is a common one in the Old Testament. As a result, it would be all but impossible that something as dramatic as the coming of the Son of God, and all the changes that this would bring to Israel, could occur without it also being a call to return to the covenant of their fathers. In other words, it is very hard to explain Christ and his ministry outside of the context of covenant renewal. It is the very form that a Jew would expect from the God of the Old Testament, calling his people back to Covenant obedience. It is hard to believe that a Jew would take seriously a prophet that did not call his people to faith in this time-honored way.

Therefore, we conclude with Meredith Kline that “the Lord of the covenant designed that the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John should perform the same function for the church that the Gospel of Moses performed for Israel, their purpose is to provide documentary attestation to the new covenant.”²⁷ We see the early beginnings of this call through John’s and Jesus’ call to repentance.

“‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’ ” (Matthew 3:2–3, ESV)

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matthew 4:17, ESV)

Continuing Covenant Behavior

Treaty/covenant behavior, which was prominent in Hittite and Hebrew culture, has now lasted over 3,500 years. Who hasn’t seen cowboy and Indian movies in which the two, tiring of their wars decide to make a treaty (covenant)? In the movies, they each make a cut on their wrist and then bind their wrists together letting the blood intermingle. This is part of a ratification ceremony. They then smoke a peace pipe and vow to be brothers, thereby making peace. The shedding of blood with the vows of peace are essential elements of a covenant which has continued for millennia. Sometimes there are blessings and curses for keeping or violating the treaty/covenant as well.

A call to covenant renewal would in our day correspond to a call by ministers of the Gospel in America to return to the God of their fathers. It would be a prayer and a call for revival and a new commitment to the

²⁵ Michael D. Guinan, “Mosaic Covenant,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 908.

²⁶ Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Second Edition.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 178.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* 197.

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ancient faith of our founding fathers, especially the Pilgrims and Puritans, seminal examples of our Christian heritage.

The Outline of the Book of Matthew

The Book of Matthew is a call to Israel to return and to renew the covenant with God. That is its central characteristic. The essential elements of a covenant outline are in the Book of Matthew just as clearly portrayed as they were in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. They are:

- I Preamble—The Covenant Giver (Matthew 1:1-2:12)
- II A Historical Prologue—The King's Past Deeds (Matthew 2:13-4:25)
- III The Stipulations of the New Covenant—Terms of the Covenant (Matthew 5-7)
- IV A Declaration of Sanctions—The Blessings and Curses (Matthew 8-25)
- V Ratification of the Covenant—The Death of the Mediator (Matthew 26-28)

You will notice point III above takes note of the stipulations of the new covenant. That section is chapters 5-7 or the Sermon on the Mount. The outline below allows us to see how this section fills that role.