

THE
POWER
of a
PROMISE

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CHAPTER 1

Adam and Eve: Covenants to Deal With an Imperfect World

C*ovenants?* What's the deal with covenants? Covenant-keeping is complicated. In our world today, people don't always keep their covenants, or promises. Loans go into default, marriages end in divorce, contracts get broken. Yet every day, people honor contracts, keep promises, and safeguard marriages. Covenants are supposed to make life better in our confusing world, but it can be hard to know who and what to believe in.

Given all the complexities and uncertainties, it can help to understand why and how covenants came about. Our imperfect world does not represent God's perfect ideal, so covenants are necessary strategies for helping us deal with an imperfect world. The covenants God makes with us shape our lives for the better—now and for eternity. As we understand the history of covenants in Scripture and the need for them, we will see how God's covenants with us give us hope. Let's look at Genesis to see why and how covenants started.

At first, God's creation was perfect; there was no need for covenants as strategies for dealing with imperfection. In His perfect world, God and humans lived the relationship of the

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everlasting covenant. The *Andrews Study Bible* describes creation as something like a potter forming vessels from clay.¹ Coming close to earth, God created a people with whom He could have a loving relationship. “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise” (Isaiah 43:21). These people would bond with Him and be a people with whom He would live out the perfection of the everlasting covenant.

Intimately close to Adam, “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). God took the same loving care in creating Eve as He did when He created Adam. “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone’ ” (verse 18). A deep sleep came upon Adam, and God removed one of his ribs and created Eve from it. The rib (verses 21, 22), in proximity to Adam’s vital organs, including his heart, could symbolize marital love and a special emotional bond for the two of them as partners in a lifelong covenant relationship. “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:28). In the love Adam and Eve had for each other, they would see God’s love for them. They were the crowning act in God’s perfect creation of this world.

Adam and Eve, together with God, are the basis of the relationship involved in the everlasting covenant. Just as God entered into a loving, everlasting covenant relationship with them, they were to enter into a similar covenant relationship with their surroundings. God blessed them and sent them forth to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). God commissioned Adam and Eve to care for all life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). They were not to tend the Garden as landscapers; they were to commune closely with God’s creation, naming each animal and honoring the covenant to care for the earth (Revelation 11:18). We can only imagine what Adam and Eve must have felt

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about life in the Garden. Perhaps they were filled with joy and happiness as they saw God's love reflected in the playful animals. Perhaps they realized His delight in variety as they named the beautiful flowers and fruit-filled plants with their infinite colors, shapes, smells, and sizes.

Their first full day together in the Garden marked their marriage as holy. God completed His Creation work by resting on the seventh day. "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:3). By sanctifying the seventh day, God set apart the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11) for a holy purpose as a sign of the covenant between Himself and His people, testifying that He is the Lord who sanctifies and makes us holy (Ezekiel 20:12, 20).

God's rest on the seventh day didn't just mark the end of His work or the beginning of the marriage covenant between Adam and Eve; it was a weekly reminder of their relationship with God and with the perfect world that He created. This is the beginning of the everlasting covenant; God says,

"For your Maker is your husband,
The LORD of hosts is His name;
And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel;
He is called the God of the whole earth"
(Isaiah 54:5).

The Sabbath is like a wedding band; it symbolizes a spiritual marriage between us and our Creator. It is a weekly reminder honoring the spiritual wedding of God to His people. He has promised us that keeping His Sabbath holy proclaims that we are in a covenantal marriage with Him.

God planted the tree of life (Genesis 2:9; 3:22) in the Garden

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to make His covenant with Adam and Eve everlasting—so that they could enjoy life for eternity. This tree was a reminder that God wanted there to be no end to His covenant with them. However, this perfect world did not last.

Adam and Eve found out the hard way that when it comes to making and keeping covenants, it can be difficult to know whom and what to believe. In the perfect world of the Garden of Eden, they had no frame of reference by which to deal with imperfections such as deception, discomfort, or death. In love, God made a perfect world with perfect people. He intended for it to be full of joy and love for eternity. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve were not successful in dealing with the serpent's deception, and they unwittingly broke their covenant with God. Let's look at Genesis 3:1–5 and see just how they were unprepared to deal with deception.

Covenants? What does a talking snake have to do with covenants? At this point in the Genesis narrative, Adam has just named the animals (Genesis 2:20) and God has just placed the first pair in charge of “every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). So far, the only ones talking have been God, Adam, and Eve. In addition, they have experienced nothing but truth in their perfect covenant with God; they are totally unprepared for untruth.

Then Satan entered the Garden in deep disguise. Just as false prophets put on “sheep's clothing” (Matthew 7:15) to deceive, Satan took on snake's clothing to sabotage Adam and Eve's covenant with God and to steal their dominion of the earth (Genesis 1:28). Satan appeared in the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17; 3:3)—not in his natural form, but as an animal, specifically a serpent (Revelation 12:7–9), the most “cunning” of all the animals (Genesis 3:1). In the perfect Garden, a serpent was not a threat to its human caretakers. They could not see

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the danger, because Satan *looked* like a serpent. They had seen serpents, but they had never seen deception.

When the smartest animal in the Garden began talking to her, Eve listened, vulnerable to curiosity and deception. A talking serpent was surprising enough to spark curiosity. *Why is it talking? What does it have to say?* After all, it was one of the animals in her care. She should not ignore it, should she? Appearing to misunderstand God's instructions, the serpent made a stealth attack. "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1). To Eve, this question might appear to be an honest one, but it stealthily cast doubt on God's instructions regarding the tree (Genesis 2:17) by suggesting that God had placed *all* the trees in the Garden off limits. This seed of doubt opened the possibility of questioning the covenant.

Eve straightened out the serpent's misunderstanding by clarifying that God's instruction applied only to the tree of knowledge of good and evil and that they were free to eat fruit from all the other trees (Genesis 3:2, 3). She also explained the penalty for not following God's instructions—she and Adam would "surely die" (Genesis 2:17) if they ate from the forbidden tree.

The serpent expanded the tiny doubt he had created by openly challenging God's statement. "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4), he declared. Just as his serpent body curling around the tree, Satan's words coiled around God's statement, reversing it and ensnaring Eve. "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (verse 5). Eve lacked a frame of reference by which to deal with this deceptive half-truth. Satan continued the insinuating lie by suggesting that God's covenant could not be broken. Basically he said, "Don't worry. You won't die. God's covenant means that you are to live eternally no matter what you do!"

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Eve knew only good; she did not yet know what evil was because God's covenant with her and Adam contained only goodness and perfection. Satan introduced imperfection and deception masquerading as a missing piece of knowledge.

In spite of God's warnings, Eve's conversation with the serpent changed the way she saw the tree. Now she saw the tree as good for food, as pleasant to the eye, and as desirable for wisdom. Conned into thinking that she was missing some essential knowledge that the tree could provide and deceived into believing that this essential knowledge would not break God's covenant, Eve took the fruit. She ate it and shared the fruit with Adam, who also ate it (verse 6).

With every contract or covenant we enter into, there are consequences if it is broken. So it was also with Adam and Eve. They were deceived into breaking their covenant with God, and thus, they were shut off from its benefits. By breaking the covenant, they left themselves devoid of God's covering, leaving them naked and afraid (verses 7, 10). They hid from God and blamed each other; they even blamed God (verses 8–13). Adam (man) was cursed; the earth now had thorns and thistles, causing him to have to work hard for his bread (verses 17–19). The woman was cursed with difficult child bearing (verse 16), and the serpent was cursed to crawl on its belly (verse 14). Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden and banished from the tree of life; they had to live with the hard lessons of doubt, deception, and death.

However, God was not willing to give up on His covenant. He immediately came to the rescue of Adam and Eve. God gave them the promise of a Messiah, saying to Satan,

“I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;

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He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel”
(verse 15).

Satan would bruise Jesus’ heel by having Him crucified, but Jesus would bruise, and even crush, Satan’s head by totally defeating him (Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Galatians 3:16).

Not only did God continue His side of the covenant with Adam and Eve by promising that one day Eve’s Seed would crush the serpent’s head, He provided a substitutionary atonement for them right then. God instructed Adam and Eve to sacrifice an animal to die in their place, and then He clothed them with that animal’s skin (Genesis 2:21). To people who had never seen death, this sacrifice graphically illustrated Jesus’ death for us as the Lamb of God (John 1:29), who clothes us with His own righteousness (Romans 10:19).

Covenants? What’s the deal with covenants? Covenants are necessary because imperfection marred God’s perfect creation. Adam and Eve fell for a con job in the Garden where there were only two competing voices. Today, our confusing world is full of competing voices, and it can be hard to know who and what to believe in. It’s easy to look back and judge Eve and Adam, but as we deal with the difficulties involved in knowing who and what to believe in, it is helpful to understand how covenants came about and to let this understanding remind us of the serpent’s modus operandi. His deception and sabotage in the Garden remind us that, like Eve, we can be deceived into breaking our covenant with God.

1. *Andrews Study Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), Genesis Study Notes, s.v. “2:7 *formed*.”