



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

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God's Covenant with People

Thus says the LORD of hosts:
Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country;
and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem;
and they shall be my people and I will be their God,
in faithfulness and in righteousness.

Zechariah 8:7-8 (RSV)



Rev. Gary Kiontke



The next to last line in the Zechariah passage is the heart of God's covenant with His people. It is God's desire that everyone on earth become one of His people by being adopted into His family through obedient faith in order that He become their God dwelling deep in their hearts.

A modern version of Webster's Dictionary defines a covenant in general as being a binding and solemn agreement between two or more parties. Theologically, it is an agreement that is based on the promises God has made to people.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary was written so all people could understand the King James Bible. Many of the definitions have multiple quotes from the King James Bible that clarify the definition. It can be accessed free of charge at:

<https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary>.

Its definition of covenant starts with the etymology: COVENANT, *noun* [L, to come; a coming together; a meeting or agreement of minds.] Between people it is: A mutual consent or agreement of two or more persons, to do or to forbear some act or thing. Theologically it is: the covenant of works ... implied in the commands, prohibitions, and promises of God; the promise of God to man, that man's perfect obedience should entitle him to happiness. This do, and live; that do, and die. (More from this dictionary later.)

Fifteen hundred years before Zechariah, God said to Abraham, as He made the everlasting covenant of circumcision with him: "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7, NAS). More importantly, Yahweh will bless all

nations on earth through Abraham and his descendants. This is stated five times in Genesis. First, He spoke it to Abram as His final blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). Then He used it as His reason to tell Abraham about His plans for Sodom (Genesis 18:18). He repeated it again after Abraham's act of obedient faith with Isaac (Genesis 22:18). Then, He repeated it to Isaac when he was sojourning with the Philistines during a time of famine (Genesis 26:4). Finally, He said it to Jacob as he had a vision in the night of angels ascending and descending on a stairway to heaven (Genesis 28:14).

God's covenant involves both promises and obligations. He always initiates the covenant. First, after the flood, He made an everlasting covenant with all living creatures to never again destroy the earth in a flood (Genesis 9:9-13). Then, He made a covenant with Abram and his descendants to give them the land of ten people groups in Canaan (Genesis 15:17-21). Later, He made a covenant with the nation of Israel on Mt. Horeb (also called Sinai) with both those who came out of Egypt and the succeeding generation born in the wilderness journey of forty years (Deuteronomy 5:1-3).

While God initiates His covenant with people and gives them promises, there is also an obligation on the part of people to obey what God commands in order to make His promises effective in them. As Moses went up the mountain to hear from Yahweh, He said that on the basis of all He did in Egypt, they must hear (obey) his voice and keep all (the commands) of His covenant (Exodus 19:1-6). In the Deuteronomy passage, Israel must keep and do the statutes and regulations Yahweh gave them in the covenant.

However, for over eight hundred years, with few and rare exceptions, God's people were unable to fulfill their covenant obligations. Then, as the remnant was sent into exile and captivity in Babylon, Yahweh spoke through the prophet Jeremiah about a

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God's Covenant with People (... continued from page #1)

new covenant He would make with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-34). First and foremost, Yahweh, the covenant initiating God, will give (put) His instructions within a person's inner being, writing it upon their hearts (the seat of human desires and affections). With this they will be able to fulfill the greatest commandment to love Yahweh, their God, with all their inner being (Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Matthew 22:34-38). Because of this every one of God's people, from the least to the greatest, will fully and experientially know Him. This is because Yahweh will forgive their iniquities (actions based on broken desires) and their sins (failure to fully obey His statutes and regulations). Through the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ all this is possible because of the gift of the Holy Spirit He gave, along with His Father, to those with obedient faith in Him (Romans 1:5).

Under the covenant given to Israel through Moses, the people of Israel had five renewals (or re-commitments) of the covenant. The first was after they had taken most of the land that was to be theirs through Yahweh's word to Abraham (Joshua 24). Then, after Athaliah (daughter of Ahab, 2 Kings 8:16-18) assassinated all but one of Ahaziah's and her sons (2 Kings 11:1-3), the high priest, Jehoiadah, led a covenant renewal (2 Kings 11:17). Later, under Hezekiah, there was another covenant renewal (2 Chronicles 29:10). The last covenant renewal before the captivity and exile was led by Hezekiah's great grandson, Josiah (2 Kings 23:1-3).

The new covenant was initiated by Jesus on the night of Passover before He was crucified. He said that this cup (is)

the new covenant in His blood that on behalf of them is being poured out (Luke 22:20). Before this, He said the bread is (explicitly) His body (Luke 22:19).

The new covenant is for all people who come to God through Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews says Jesus guarantees a better covenant because He is a high priest who now lives forever (Hebrews 7:12-28). And people enter into this covenant by unwavering faith in Jesus (Hebrews 10:25-30, quoting Habakkuk 2:3-4).

Paul said of the Lord's Supper: "As often as y'all are eating this bread and y'all are drinking the cup, the death of the Lord y'all are declaring, until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:20, 26). This could be interpreted to mean that whenever Christians partake of the sacrament of communion while worshipping as the Body of Christ, they are renewing the new covenant.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary has this as the final theological definition of covenant: "The covenant of grace is that by which God engages to bestow salvation on man, upon the condition that man shall believe in Christ and yield obedience to the terms of the gospel." (This was affirmed by Paul in Romans 1:1-5).

These are some reflections on God's covenants with people. I welcome any discussion from readers as to their understanding of His covenant with us. ~v~

Worship in January

We will be working through the highlights of the book of Joshua from now until Easter Sunday.

We will have Communion on January 5 and 19.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes for each of the worship services:

Date	Scripture	Title
January 5	Joshua 1:12-18; Psalm 133	All Israel follows Joshua
January 12	Joshua 2:1-21; Psalm 117	A pagan woman shows faith in Yahweh
January 19	Joshua 3:1-17; Psalm 77:14-20	Yahweh miraculously opens a way for His people
January 26	Joshua 5:5-15; Psalm 35:1-5	Joshua meets the commander of Yahweh's army

We will have fellowship and food on January 12 and 26.

It Just Happens*... “Joshua 1 — Act Wisely”

By Petros

“It Just Happens*” ... I found myself intrigued by Pastor Gary’s sermon on God’s commission of Joshua to lead the Israel nation across the Jordan River and attack Jericho as the first conquest to take the land promised through Moses (Chapter 1). Joshua is to meditate on God’s Word so he will act wisely. Then he will know that God is always with him. I thought about Gaza, this was part of the Promised Land that God proclaimed would be “your (Israel’s) land”. After a Google search on the topic, it seems to me Israel the nation occupied the land that was previously occupied by the nations in Canaan. Israel invaded and conquered as the descendants of Abraham. So, does it just happen that followers of God lose their insight into God’s ways when their attention strays from meditating on God’s Word that they no longer will act wisely?

“It Just Happens*” ... I thought of how God could have sent a plague to remove the inhabitants of Canaan (evil beyond saving, as it was with Sodom and Gomorrah). I thought the people of Israel would have started off with homes and civil infrastructure, in order to spend more quality time with Yahweh (God) and their families. But perhaps a visual reminder of the enemy dying was necessary for them to experience the reality of separation from God. And their possibility of disobedience by failing to slay all the inhabitants would have been removed if God didn’t, in His Wisdom, command them to do it.

My apologies for being so forward with my thoughts; but it all comes back to Joshua meditating on God’s Word daily so that he will act wisely. If we also meditate on God’s Word, he will be with us. And a special note for men. A warning on the absence of seeking and delighting in God’s Word will be an opening for darkness to tempt us to lust for sexual favors, including orgies (Galatians 5:16-18).

This past month, The Barn on 156 Main St., based on Psalm 150:6, (Let all Praise the Lord!) has the foundation knee walls (with framed-in window supports) completed. The center support beam, to support the first floor, is ready to be positioned over the single support post. My dream to have large plate glass, salvaged from the Boston Science Museum, has fallen off the radar due to the Building Inspector’s no reply and the contractor’s experience on acceptable building practices. “It Just Happens*...” I “found” a stack of (very affordable) insulated windows and was waiting in line to check out, when I “accidentally” struck up a conversation with a Home Works Energy Rep. He pointed out I could qualify for no-cost insulation; an issue that I was avoiding because of the cost! That started me on the trail for building not only a barn but a barn as an addition. Which means the hope to have heat and plumbing has grown feet and could be covered in my budget. God is so good to nudge me to give up the non-insulated plate glass and supply insulated windows just in time for framing. If plans come together and the weather cooperates, my builder says I will have a usable barn garage for the winter. PTL!!!!

“It Just Happens*...” when I was waiting to check out, the woman in front of me finally got to the cashier but proceeded to look at more things to buy at the cashier checkout. I remained calm, after all I was getting great advice on a new direction to include Mass-Save incentives. After a little more waiting, I got called to bring my two stacks of windows to another checkout. After saving hundreds of dollars on Restore (Habitat for Humanity) windows, I was blocked from leaving by the same woman, with her shopping cart. Once I got out to my van, I assessed how I was going to get underneath the triple window assembly and slide it in, on my back. After several adjustments due to a parked car in my way, I was going to give it a go. Just before the point where I would not be able to lift the window without the chance breaking it, I heard a woman saying, “If you pull your van up, I can help you get the windows in.” I turned around to see it was the woman that had been in my way. Why didn’t I think of pulling up my van??!! She was so helpful and pleasant, like we were good friends. I was humbled. While moving, she picked up my cell phone that I didn’t know I had dropped. She put it in the front seat along with her pocketbook for safe keeping. She was a caring, beautiful soul. More humble pie. She helped me load a van full of glass windows without one bit of hesitation. God showed me such Grace. Not only the woman, but many others who just blessed me ... all because I’m working on building The Barn for a House of Worship.

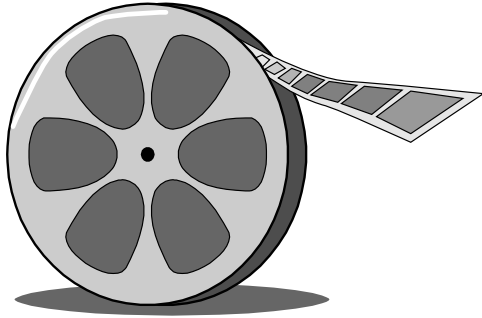
“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor uselessly.” Psalm 127:1



Author’s note: This article’s title “It Just Happens*...” counters the cliché ... things just don’t happen. “It” will stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. “Just” is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. “Happens” will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds. ~v~

Movie Night

Friday, January 24 at 7:00 PM



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday. The movies shown in the past have covered a range of genres, and were usually thought provoking.

We are able to show these movies based on the church's CVLI® license. However, this license does not allow us to advertise or publicize the names of these movies to the general public, and they are always free of charge.

We usually have free snacks available, and you are also welcome to bring your own meal, if you wish.

So, please join us for a night out at the movies!





JANUARY 2025

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
29	30	31	1 New Year's Day	2	3	4
5 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	6	7	8 (††)	9 (**)	10	11
12 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #2)	13	14	15 (††)	16 (**)	17	18
19 Communion Sunday (Note #3)	20	21	22 (††)	23 (**)	24 Movie Night (Note #4)	25
26 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #5)	27 February "Vestry Voices" Articles Due (Note #6)	28	29 (††)	30 (**)	31	1

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 1/5 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 1/12 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
- #3) 1/19 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #4) 1/24 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- #5) 1/26 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
- #6) 1/27 — Articles are due for the February issue of "Vestry Voices" (for assembly/mail-out on January 28).
- (††)** Wednesday Bible Study: **11:00 AM (but not on 1/1/2025)** (in FCC Parlor).
- (**)** Thursday Prayer in Parlor: **3:00 PM (but not on 1/2/2025).**

