

Making Sense of the Old Testament God

Seven Rivers Church, Fall 2025

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 10	Unit 1	Is God a Moral Monster?
September 17	Unit 2	Kosher Foods, Weird Laws, and Harsh Punishments
September 24	Unit 3	Women in Israel: Misogyny, Polygamy, and Concubinage
October 1		First Pray
October 8	Unit 4	Slavery and Human Trafficking
October	Unit 5	Indiscriminate Massacre, Ethnic Cleansing, and Violence

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Copan, Paul. *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011.

Wright, Christopher J.H. *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

Williams, Michael D. *Far As the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption*. P&R Publishing, 2005.

UNIT 1

IS GOD A MORAL MONSTER?

I/ How We Arrive at the Question

A. Personal experience

B. Objections from unbelievers

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

—Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

“The Old Testament was put together by crude, uncultured human animals...And the Ten Commandments are proof that religion is manmade.”

—Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*

C. Chronological and cultural distance

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to follow them:

- I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?
- I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35.2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?
- A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Lev. 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?
- Leviticus 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?
- Most of my make friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Leviticus 19:27. How should they die?
- I know from Leviticus 11:6-8 that toughing the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?
- My uncle has a farm. He violates Leviticus 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend)...

I know you have studied these things extensively; so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan.

II/ Foundational Principles

A. The immutability of God

“For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”
(Malachi 3:6)

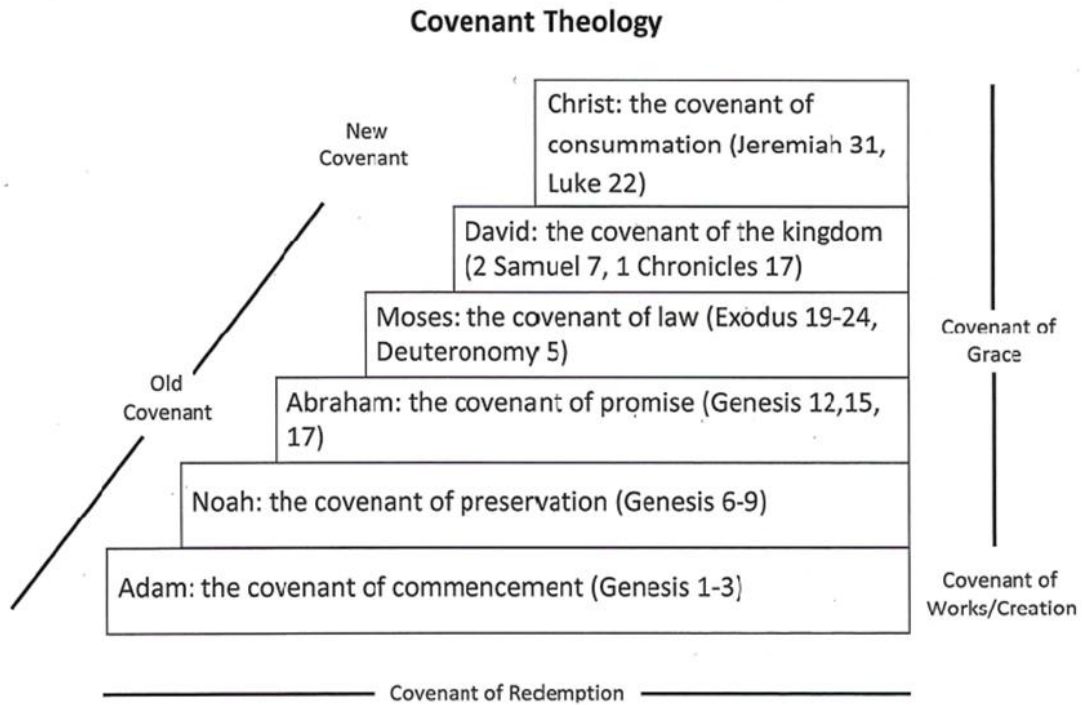
In this world where men forget us, change their attitude toward us as their private interests dictate, and revise their opinion of us for the slightest cause, is it not a source of wondrous strength to know that the God with whom we have to do changes not? That His attitude toward us now is the same as it was in eternity past and will be in eternity to come?

What peace it brings to the Christian’s heart to realize that our Heavenly Father never differs from Himself. In coming to Him at any time we need not wonder whether we shall find Him in a receptive mood. He is always receptive to misery and need, as well as to love and faith. He does not keep office hours nor set aside periods when He will see no one. Neither does He change His mind about anything. Today, this moment, He feels toward His creatures, toward babies, toward the sick, the fallen, the sinful, exactly as He did when He sent His only-begotten Son into the world to die for mankind.

God never changes moods or cools off in His affections or loses enthusiasm. His attitude toward sin is now the same as it was when He drove out the sinful man from the eastward garden, and His attitude toward the sinner the same as when He stretched forth His hands and cried, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

—A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

B. Covenant theology



*Adapted from O. Falmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1980.

C. The nation of Israel and the New Testament church

D. Civil/ceremonial/moral laws

E. “Context is king”

F. Description vs prescription (The “is-ought” fallacy)

G. "Chronological snobbery"

...the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited... You must find out why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. From seeing this, one passes to the realization that our own age is also 'a period,' and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions. They are likeliest to lurk in those widespread assumptions which are so ingrained in the age that no one dares to attack or feels it necessary to defend them.

—C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*

"The newer is the truer,
only what is recent is decent,
every shift of ground is a step forward,
and every latest word must be hailed as the last word on its subject."

—J.I. Packer

H. Incremental steps and the redemptive movement of history

He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. (Matthew 19:8)

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent..." (Acts 17:30)

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. (Romans 3:25)

I. Religion vs. the gospel

J. The gifts of Judaism and Christianity

“One of the things we were asked to look into was what accounted for the success, in fact, the pre-eminence of the West all over the world,” he said. “We studied everything we could from the historical, political, economic, and cultural perspective. At first, we thought it was because you had more powerful guns than we had. Then we thought it was because you had the best political system. Next, we focused on your economic system. But in the past twenty years, we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West has been so powerful. The Christians moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don’t have any doubt about that.” –Chinese Scholar

K. Jesus as the fulfiller of the Old Testament

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (Matthew 5:17)

III/ Two Test Cases

A. A jealous, arrogant, angry God?

B. The sacrifice of Isaac

[1] After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [2] He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." [3] So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. [4] On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. [5] Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." [6] And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. [7] And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" [8] Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. [9] When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10] Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. [11] But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [12] He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." [13] And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. [14] So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." (Genesis 22:1–14, ESV)

