

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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Covenantal Evil (II)

This newsletter is the second part of a study on the covenantal nature of evil. My focus in the first part was on false transcendence. I purposely did not talk about the structure of the passage because I knew that I would not have enough space. I also thought I needed to concentrate on a thorough-going discussion of transcendence; for one, I believed that my readers needed to be introduced to Frame's material, and for another, a discussion on transcendence/false transcendence sets the context for everything that Satan tries to do. Now it is time, however, to consider the covenant lawsuit structure of the unit as a whole.

Lawsuit Structure of Genesis 3

In 1967, Julien Harvey, the French Canadian Catholic scholar, wrote a seminal book on the concept of covenant-lawsuit.¹ He observed five basic elements in the lawsuit that I believe correspond to the five-fold structure developed in my book,

specifically devoted to the conclusion, "Little By Little," to the subject of covenant lawsuit in . . . At that time I relied heavily on the work of Walter Brueggemann, another student of the covenant lawsuit pattern in the Bible; I also used his development of the suzerainty structure of Joshua 24 in the November (1987) issue of *Covenantal Worship: Better than a Hymn Sandwich*."

Harvey's work, however, has opened up whole sections of the Bible to covenantal analysis. He has pointed out a very distinct covenant lawsuit pattern in Deuteronomy 32:1-15, Isaiah 1:1-20, Micah 6:1-8, Jeremiah 2:5-35, and Psalm 50:1-23. This pattern also appears in Genesis 3. Before examining Genesis 3 in greater detail, what is this outline according to Harvey?

1.

God always begins by speaking in history, just as he began history by speaking it into existence. When He comes to bring lawsuit, however, he calls witnesses.

A. An appeal for attention.

The witnesses are first called and told to attend to the matter of covenant-breaking. They are recruited for the specific purpose of carrying out the covenant Word uttered by God.

B. Declaration of Yahweh's justice and accusation of the covenant people.

After the witnesses are called, a specific challenge or accusation is made. The witnesses' work begins in confrontation. Any time a pericope opens

with a confrontation of some sort, therefore, a covenant lawsuit is probably being issued.

II. An Interrogation

Harvey says that the second distinguishable mark of the lawsuit is the use of interrogation. This section is characterized by questions. God convicts with interrogation. He uses it to make man condemn himself, and hopefully, he will come to a state of repentance before a judgment is rendered. Quite often the questions are even rhetorical. One clear example of the use of questions, rhetorical and otherwise, is Remans. The entire second section of the book, hierarchy, is developed in terms of the following:

And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? (Something Jim Swaggert should have remembered; [Remans 2:3])

You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? (Remans 2:23)

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? (Remans 3:1)

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? (Remans 4:1)

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? (Remans 6:1)

Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? (Remans 7:1)

On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? (Remans 9:20)

In view of Harvey's insights, the covenant-structure-thesis is virtually irrefutable. Remans not only follows the covenant, but it tracks the covenant lawsuit. Many scholars have attempted to explain why Paul uses so much interrogation in this book, but none to my knowledge have given a satisfactory explanation. Once again, the covenant model provides the answer to a difficult problem. Paul was obviously copying the Old Testament's interrogative method in covenant lawsuit, which should not surprise anyone; after all, he was the Jew of Jews!

III.

The third section of the covenant lawsuit turns to the indictment itself.

1. Julien Harvey, *Le Plaidoyer Prophetique Contre Israel Apres La Rupture De L'Alliance* (Montreal: Les Editions Bellarmin, 1967).

- A. Yahweh's past beneficence and generosity are noted.
- B. The unfaithfulness of the people is contrasted.
- C. Warning against reliance on false gods and cultic remedies is issued.

IV.

God makes a judgment. He declares the accused guilty or innocent.

V.

There are two types. One is irrevocable and the other is not.

- A. Final condemnation can be expressed in curses and threats (Type A). This type does not allow for any reversal. The judgment is final.
- B. A condemnation is issued that demands renewed loyalty (Type B). This judgment is not final, allowing for repentance and covenant renewal.

Harvey's understanding of the covenant lawsuit provides a structure for understanding Genesis 3. The chapter goes through this outline twice: first as a covenant lawsuit by Satan against God, and second as a covenant lawsuit by God against Satan, Adam, and Eve. Let's adjust our original overview of Genesis 3 in terms of Harvey's summary of covenantal lawsuit, and then examine Satan's lawsuit in greater detail.

Satan's Lawsuit

1. Satan's Call (3:1a)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman,

II. Satan's Interrogation (3:1b)

Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?"

III. Woman's Indictment (3:2-3)

And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'"

IV. Satan's Declaration of Innocence (3:4-5)

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

V. Adam's and Eve's Condemnation (3:6-7)

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then when the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings (Genesis 3:1-7).

God's Counter-Lawsuit

1. God's call of witnesses (3:8-10)

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

II. Gods Interrogation of Adam and Eve (3:11-13)

And He (God) said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman w-horn Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

III. God's indictment of the Serpent, Eve, and Adam (3:14-19).

And the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

IV. Pronouncement of Guilt (3:20-21)

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

V. Condemnation (3:22-24)

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" – therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.

We could continue in the Book of Genesis and discover that the same covenant lawsuit process repeats itself. In Genesis 4, God extends a covenantal call to Adam and Eve in the form of the birth of their first child. He expects them to pick up where everything left off before Satan deceived them. He calls upon them to renew the dominion mandate, using the additional help He is providing through the gift of Cain and then Abel.

This covenantal call feature is not a lawsuit, but it is quickly followed by one. Cain carries out covenant lawsuit against his brother Abel. God then activates a lawsuit against Cain, paralleling His lawsuit against the Serpent, Eve, and Adam. And so on and so on the process will go all the way through Genesis, indeed the Bible: covenantal call, covenantal rebellion through lawsuit, and covenantal prosecution through counter-lawsuit: creation, fall, dominion.

For our purposes in this study, we will return to a more thorough examination of Satan's lawsuit, actually a false

Satan's Lawsuit (Genesis 3:1-7)

Satan approaches to bring a lawsuit. He cannot come directly before the throne of God because man stands between God and Satan. Since Adam was a priest, whose role is primarily that of guardian, the throne of God was protected. Later in the Bible, Satan can proceed right to the throne of God and ask for permission to tempt Job. Initially, however, it is worth noting that Satan could never have done such a thing. He was limited in his movement within the courts of God. He could not dare approach a holy God. In fact, he did not even dare to confront Adam. He was afraid of failure. He bet on the sure thing. He got to the man through the woman, the priest's assistant. By the way, this theme appears all through the Bible. Priest is attacked through the bride or the assistant.

1.

the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman,

Satan's call is juxtaposed to God's call of Adam and Eve. How do we know? The context of Satan's temptation is probably the seventh day of creation.² It logically follows chapter two, which describes the details of day six. Why is this important, and what does it have to do with Satan's call for witnesses?

The sixth day of creation began with the creation of man and woman. We are told of their creation in chapter two, but we are informed of something God said to them after their creation in chapter 1, probably the last thing they heard before going to sleep on day six:

God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1 :28)

God called them to the dominion mandate. Notice that He called them together, and so they already had to have been created and standing before Him. Also, given the chronology of the details of chapter two – creation of animals, making of man, instruction of man's need for a spouse by means of the animals, provision of the woman, and then marriage of man and woman through covenant ceremony – the call was given after all of these details.

God first created what man needed to fulfill his call. Then- He ~~actually issued the call~~; of course, God would provide additional supplies for dominion, but Adam essentially had what he needed. This principle of being called to act on the basis of what has been done in the past is intensified after the Fall. But there is also the concept that God calls first and promises to provide whatever is needed to carry out the call, having only provided enough to begin the call.

Why? He tells man to rely on what has already been supplied, but much more is left to be done and undone after the Fall. This is the challenge of faith. Man after the Fall is called to trust in what God will do to provide for the call given him. According to Paul, "Faith is the assurance

of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

In Adam's and Eve's case, however, call follows provision. It followed Adam's and Eve's provision. It had to come at the end of a long day because so much of God's creation was provided on that sixth day. It was the most filled day of all. None of the others compared in fullness to it, except the seventh, the day Satan most likely negotiated the Fall of man.

Satan began the day by prosecuting a lawsuit against God. He started with his own call, probably in the night and just before the final meal of the day. The first creation day moves from night to day, as in the old Jewish calendar where the day ends at six in the evening. Satan chose a time when Adam would be most vulnerable: a time when he could get Eve's attention without arousing the first man's defense system, that is, a time just before the meal when Adam would be tired, hungry and the most cooperative. He set the precedent for all "falls" in the Bible.³

Satan needed more than timing. Part of calling a witness is getting his attention. Satan got Eve's attention with his beauty and power. How? In reality he appeared as a ~~dragon~~, probably a fire-breathing one. He did not come to Eve as your basic garden variety "type of snake, such as most of the children's Bible story books portray him. He was the most beautiful animal in the garden, as well as the most intelligent; he talked. Consider this description:

In that day the Lord will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, with his fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea (Isaiah 27:1).

Satan caught Eve's attention. But let's not lose perspective. Satan was soliciting a witness to join with him in bringing a lawsuit. He is not original. All he can do is copy or pervert God. God calls witnesses by getting their attention. So must Satan.

//. (3:1b)

"Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

He asked her a question: "Indeed, has God said?" (Genesis 3:1b), a question that has become the slogan of all rebellion. The derivative of the Hebrew (*sheol*) is a word that means "asking" (*sha'l*).⁴ Hell is preeminently a place of asking questions. Does this mean that asking a question is wrong? Hardly. Only those questions are wrong that second guess the Word of God in a rebellious fashion.

Satan's question is the classic example. He knew that Eve knew what God had said. But he raised the question to provoke her to go back to God's instructions and turn them over in her mind such that they would come out different. He asked a question, but it is obvious that the question was not just for simple information, nor was it your basic inquisitiveness, and it certainly was not in depth Bible study, the kind that roots around for those precious "nuggets" of insight from Scripture. There is another kind of question that is rebellious in nature and ought not be asked. The Apostle Paul says that there is one question man should never ask: "The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this'" (Romans 9:20). What's wrong with this question? For one, it asks a

2. Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (Tyler, Texas: I. C. E., [1982] 1987), Ch 5. Or. North has the best defense of the sabbath day view of the Fall. It is not new, for many of the early Church fathers, the Reformers, and the Puritans held the same position. It could even be argued that the majority of commentaries on the early chapters of Genesis hold this position. By the way, if you haven't purchased the new and improved edition of *The Dominion Covenant*, the second edition, run to the nearest bookstore and ask for it. If they don't have it, tell them that they had better stock it. Then, in the mean time, write to I.C.E. and buy it. Write to: I. C. E., Box 8000, Tyler, Texas, 75711.

3. Perhaps the most memorable fall at evening before a meal is the story when Esau sold his birth-right, and of course the other would be the fall of Judas, who betrayed Jesus before and at the Last Supper

4. Francis Brown, S. R.' Driver, C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1907] 1972), pp. 981-983.

question that challenges the wisdom of God. It in essence says, "Look at me God, why in the world would You make me like this? You couldn't possibly have known what You were doing when You made me, could You?" Of course God did, but we are instructed never to ask such a question because beyond the simple answer, "For God's own glory," we are not permitted to go.

Second, it asks a question that can never be answered. So what's wrong with that? The man who keeps asking the question that can never be answered is bound either to end up insane, or in a cult. And if he continues to concentrate on that which cannot be answered, his motives are bad! He will end in apostasy!

In Satan's case, he had already apostatized. So what was he really doing with his question? The other thing that a question does is it puts the recipient of the question on the defensive. He must immediately make several assessments. He must first determine if he even knows the answer. If he doesn't, he is placed in the awkward position of having to say, "I don't know." If he does know the answer, then he must determine whether or not he should answer the question. If he has the answer and he knows that he should answer the question, then finally, he must decide how to answer it.

When a question is asked, in other words, the recipient is immediately placed on trial. A hierarchy is established. It is the hierarchy of interrogator to the witness. This is the role that Satan assumed with the woman, and ultimately, with God. He wanted to put "God in the dock," to quote the familiar title of one of C. S. Lewis's excellent books.

III. (3:2-3)

And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'"

Normally in a covenant lawsuit, God indicts at this point. He usually contrasts His faithfulness, beneficence and generosity to the accused's unfaithfulness. Notice how Satan turns everything around. First, he asks a question that provokes Eve to confuse God's initial command: "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). God said nothing about "not touching" the tree. But Eve did what fallen man often does. She added a stipulation to God's commandment that would make it easier to break the commandment. How? Her thinking probably went according to the following: "God said don't eat and don't touch, but there couldn't be anything wrong with touching. So there couldn't be anything wrong with eating."

Second, Satan lured Eve into indicting God. How? She changed the Lord's commandment, which essentially meant she was not satisfied with the original command. She was attacking the command by changing it. She was explicitly saying that God's command was not right, or unfair. Any time God's law is altered, He is being challenged. This is why adding to or taking away is so offensive to God (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18).

IV. (3:4-5)

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The fourth section of the Deuteronomic covenant discusses how the covenant is actually ratified (Deuteronomy 27-30). It is entered by an oath that judicially and ceremonially places sanctions of blessing and cursing on those embracing the covenant. When the covenant is broken, covenant lawsuit is made. God declares the covenant-breaker guilty. In Satan's lawsuit, however, he makes an emphatic declaration that God's sanction is not true. God had said that man would "surely die" the day he ate of the forbidden fruit. Satan categorically says he "surely will not die."

V. (3:6-7)

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then when the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings (Genesis 3:1-7).

The final section of covenant lawsuit either provisionally or permanently passes condemnation. In Satan's lawsuit he condemns God. How? He gets Adam and Eve to do that which attempts to bring God under his own judgment. He does this by leading them to break the commandment. Yes, disobedience is actually a condemnation of God; the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, preceded by the lengthy trials, is the classic example. So although it is not explicitly stated, taking the fruit is the final step in the false-lawsuit-process. The result: in the garden, man was himself placed under condemnation; and he sewed fig leaves to prove it. By the Grace of God, however, the story does not stop there. God begins His counter-lawsuit that ultimately culminates at the Cross, where His Only Begotten Son is judged and executed for man. In the next issue, we will examine closely God's method of counter-lawsuit.