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## Let's Make a Deal

In 1963 the American television game show *Let's Make a Deal* came on the air. It became famous for awarding prizes based on choices the contestants made. They could choose what lay behind curtain number one, two, or three; and their choices won them either desirable rewards or undesirable consequences. In like manner, God made a “deal,” or covenant, with the children of Israel that generated either a blessed outcome or a cursed one, depending on their choices. The terms of the Mosaic contract between God and Israel were specific and binding:

*All of you stand today before the LORD your God . . . that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath, which the LORD your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Dt. 29:10, 12–13).*

A divine covenant was an agreement with God to serve Him and be in position to receive His promises. If the Lord swore to keep the covenant, it meant He would be faithful to fulfill it. A principle of contract law is the need for a “meeting of the minds.” Each party must unambiguously, unequivocally understand what the other is pledging. There can be no confusion or doubt as to who will fulfill the agreement or how it will be fulfilled. A relationship is forged with obligations and responsibilities for each party.

The Mosaic Covenant’s form was well established in law codes throughout the ancient Near East. Not surprisingly, God accommodated the known structure so that Israel and the nations could understand the relationship agreed to at the foot of Mount Sinai. The form was the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty, and the archaeological record has many examples from 1400 BC to 1200 BC.

The suzerain (ruling authority) pledged to and received pledges from the vassal (his inferior), who would pay him tribute or fight in his army. These treaties began with a preamble naming the suzerain and giving his titles, followed by a prologue recounting how the suzerain previously provided for the vassal and therefore should give him allegiance, followed by covenant stipulations describing what the suzerain would do for the vassal and what was expected from the vassal in return. Everything was pledged before “divine witnesses,” with a final statement to the vassal of blessings for his obedience and curses for his disobedience.

Deuteronomy reveals this structure as Moses, the mediator of the covenant (1:1–4), reviews God’s historical acts as Suzerain in protecting and providing for Israel as vassal (1:5—4:43). The covenant stipulates what God promises the nation entering the Promised Land and what He expects from His covenant people (4:44—11:32).

Since He alone is divine, God calls on “heaven and earth” (4:26; 30:19; 31:28; cf. 32:1) as witnesses, gives the terms of blessing and curses (chaps. 27—28), and concludes with a covenant summary (chaps. 29—30).

God accommodated customs and culture to give His Word to His people. The Bible itself followed this pattern, existing in the forms of a scroll and a codex. Moreover, God Himself took our form when the Word became flesh (Jn. 1:14) and dwelt among us. As the Messiah, He observed the culture and customs of the day, mediating a New Covenant (Heb. 9:15) through His death on a Roman cross under the condemnation of Jewish law.

To each of us willing to enter into a relationship with Him, He says, “Let’s make a deal.” But unlike the game show, the rewards are all desirable because He suffered the curse for us, leaving only blessings for those in covenant with Him.



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