# Covenants and Dispensations
Part III
by Thomas Ice

It is common in the interchange between many who do not see a future for national Israel and those who do to emphasize different passages that appear to the advocate to support their views. I believe that both the sovereign, unconditional decrees of God, as expressed in unconditional covenants such as the Abrahamic and the many conditional responsibilities required of Israel in a conditional covenant such as the Mosaic are both true. It is certainly true that God has decreed certain sovereign outcomes in the Abrahamic Covenant. It is also certainly true that there are many stipulations or conditions that Israel must perform before these sovereign outcomes will occur in history. How are they harmonized?

## Israel: A Case Study

The nation of Israel provides us with an excellent case study of the interplay between the sovereign decrees of an unconditional covenant (the Abrahamic) and the conditional stipulations of a conditional covenant (the Mosaic). Within the domain of the Abrahamic Covenant God has promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants a land, a seed and to make them a worldwide blessing (12:1–3, 7–9; 13:14–18; 15:1–18; 17:1–27; 22:15–19; 26:2–6, 24–25; 27:28–29, 38–40; 28:1–4, 10–22; 31:3, 11–13; 32:22–32; 35:9–15; 48:3–4, 10–20; 49:1–28; 50:23–25). If we look at the land aspect of this unconditional promise we see that there are conditions or stipulations interjected by the later conditional Mosaic Covenant that impact, not whether the land belongs to Israel, but whether the Jewish people would be allowed by God to dwell in the land and enjoy its benefits.

For example Deuteronomy 4 provides some conditions for the nation remaining in the Land when it says the following:

> When you become the father of children and children's children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you shall surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but shall be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you shall be left few in number among the nations, where the LORD shall drive you (Deut. 4:25–27).

We see a similar scenario in Leviticus 26:

> Yet if in spite of this, you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with wrathful hostility against you; and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins . . . (Lev. 26:27–28).
> I will lay waste your cities as well, and will make your sanctuaries desolate; and I will not smell your soothing aromas. And I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled over it. You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste (Lev. 26:31–33).

Some critics who do not believe in a future for Israel like to quote from passages like Deuteronomy 4 and Leviticus 26 and conclude that God is finished with the nation of Israel because of their disobedience. These critics err in only reading and taking into account part of the Bible and do not read and harmonize the whole of Scripture on these matters.

Even within the contexts of Deuteronomy 4 and Leviticus 26 there is a promise of ultimate restoration of the nation to her land when she believes:

> But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them. (Deut. 4:29–31).

> Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD. (Lev. 26:44–45).

So we see that God makes a sovereign decree about Israel, as expressed through an unconditional covenant. Then the Lord states the stipulations by which the sovereign decree will be fulfilled, as expressed through a conditional covenant. What this means is that one day Israel will dwell in the Land in the future, but that it will be done only when she meets certain conditions for dwelling in the land. Since both covenants (Abrahamic and Mosaic; unconditional and conditional) are absolutely true then this means that Israel will one day dwell in the land and will do so by having met the stipulations for dwelling in the land. This means that Israel will one day come to believe in the Messiahship of Jesus, which will result in her dwelling in the land until the end of history.

We see in the prophets sovereign declarations that reflect the thrust of an unconditional covenant as in Amos 9.

> "Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them, they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them," says the LORD your God. (Amos 9:14–15).

There are also passages in the prophets that indicate Israel will enter into her blessing when she believes as we find in Ezekiel 36.

> "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of

> flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God" (Ezek. 36:24–28).

Many critics ignore the whole counsel of the word of God on these matters. True, thus far in history Israel has been characterized as having a heart of stone, but, the Bible teaches that one day God will remove that heart of stone and give Israel a new heart and she will believe. Thus, God will provide the means for accomplishing His overall plan for His elect nation. In the past Israel was not able to dwell in the Land and enjoy its blessings because of disobedience. In the future Israel will be able to dwell in the Land and enjoy its blessings because of obedience. So whatever stipulations that conditional covenants require will be met in history in order to see that the promises made to the forefathers in the original unconditional covenant is worked out in history.

Other passages speak of a future time in which Israel will come into a right relationship nationally with the Lord. "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, . . ." (Zech. 12:10). Notice that God's sovereign grace is poured out upon the Jewish remnant in this passage that results in their repentance. It is certain to happen in the future. The passage goes on and says, "'In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. And it will come about in that day,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land'" (Zech. 13:1–2). Many other similar passages speak of a future day when Israel will become obedient because of a work of God's grace on their hearts (see also Isa. 61:8–9; Jer. 31:31–40; 50:4–5; Ezek. 11:19–20; 34:25–26).

## CONCLUSION

When we take into account the whole counsel of the Word of God on a matter it becomes clear that both unconditional and conditional covenants do not cancel out the promises of one another as some critics contend, instead they work in concert with each other when viewed within the context of the flow of history and the progress of revelation. We see that an unconditional covenant expresses a sovereign decree of what the end of a matter will be. God then comes in and complicates a matter by saying that something can only occur if certain conditions are followed as stated in a conditional covenant. This means that God will work in history to bring to pass the means (stipulations in a conditional covenant) so that the outcomes in His plan will also be fulfilled (unconditional covenant). Anyone trying to use the conditional stipulations of a conditional covenant to negate the clear outcomes of an unconditional covenant have not correctly harmonized the role and interaction of both kinds of covenants. God keeps His Word. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**