

COVENANTS AND DISPENSATIONS
Part IV
by Thomas Ice

Now that we have seen the interplay between an unconditional and conditional covenant, I will conduct a survey of the various biblical covenants in order to obtain an overview of them. These are not the theological covenants of Covenant Theology, but instead are the significant covenants that are taught in the Bible itself. These covenants are either taught directly in the Bible or deduced from Scripture as containing the properties of a covenant even if that designation is not used in the biblical text. There are at least eight biblical covenants that should be considered.

THE EDENIC COVENANT

The Edenic Covenant (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15-17) provides the pre-Fall basis that God employs to establish His rule and relationship to mankind. This is a conditional covenant that was made between God and all mankind. Even though not called a covenant in the Genesis text the components of a covenant can be observed in the text. Since Adam and mankind is cursed due to human failure to keep these stipulations this supports the notion that such would not continue to be the case if these things were not administered through an agreement or covenant. The Edenic Covenant, in conjunction with the Cultural Mandate (Gen. 1:26-28), provides the basis for areas of individual human responsibility, social, political and economic duties, as well as accountability before God for all humanity down through subsequent history. This covenant provides the judicial basis for God's rule over mankind. It provides, for example, the legal jurisdiction for God's judgment through the Flood (Gen. 6—8). After the fall into sin, other covenants will augment this foundational relationship.

THE ADAMIC COVENANT

The Adamic Covenant (Gen. 3:14-19) is initiated between God and mankind because of Adam's sin. This is a conditional covenant that was made between God and all mankind. Even though it is not mentioned in Genesis this covenant is referenced in Hosea where it says, "But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me" (Hosea 6:7). This covenant contains the cursed status of man and creation that he must endure throughout history. The curse will be primarily removed during the millennial reign of Christ (Rom. 8:19-23) and finally death will be eliminated during the eternal state (1 Cor. 15:53-57; Rev. 21:4; 22:3).

THE NOAHIC COVENANT

The Noahic Covenant (Gen. 8:20—9:17) restates God's authority over man and his duties as found in the Adamic Covenant (Gen. 9:1), and then it adds further responsibilities. This is a conditional covenant that was made between God and all mankind. These new items include the following: 1) Animosity between mankind and the animal kingdom (9:2). 2) Man should now eat animal flesh for food (9:3). 3) While eating flesh, the blood shall not be consumed, but drained (9:4). 4) Human life is so valuable that God requires the death of the one who murders another—capital punishment (9:5-6). 5) "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1,7). The Noahic Covenant is made between God and all subsequent humanity, including the entire animal kingdom (9:8-10). In this covenant God promises to never destroy the world again through a flood (9:11). The sign that God will keep His promise is the

rainbow set within a cloud (9:12-17). A rainbow is likely chosen because it is presented elsewhere as an item that surrounds the very throne room of God (Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3) representing His person and presence. The Noahic Covenant is mentioned again specifically in Isaiah 54:9-10.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 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) is the mother of all redemptive covenants. This is an unconditional covenant that was made between the Lord God of Israel and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants. Every blessing that redeemed believers receive, both within Israel and the church, flows from this covenant. While the covenant is first introduced in Genesis 12:1-3, it is actually cut or made in Genesis 15:1-21, reaffirmed in Genesis 17:1-21, and then renewed with Isaac in Genesis 26:2-5 and Jacob in Genesis 28:10-17. It is an unconditional covenant in which God unconditionally obligates Himself to bring to pass definite promises, blessings, and conditions for the covenanted people. The three major provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant are that of 1) land to Abram and Israel, 2) a seed (including Christ), 3) a worldwide blessing. In all statements of the Abrahamic Covenant there are over a dozen provisions. Some apply to Abraham; some to Israel, the seed; while some pertain to Gentiles.

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

The Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 20—23; Deuteronomy) was given exclusively and only to the nation of Israel (Psa. 147:19-20) and was fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus Christ during His first advent (Matt. 5:17). The Mosaic Covenant is a conditional covenant made between the Lord and the twelve tribes of Israel. This Covenant was designed to teach Israel how they were to please God and live as His chosen nation. The measuring stick was to be the Law aspect of the Covenant. The Law was designed to govern every aspect of Israel's life: the spiritual, moral, social, religious and civil aspects. The commandments were a "ministry of condemnation" and "of death" (2 Cor. 3:7-9). The Church Age believer is not in any way, shape, or form under the obligations of the Mosaic Law, but under the Law of Christ and the Spirit (Rom. 3:21-27; 6:14-15; Gal. 2:16; 3:10, 16-18, 24-26; 4:21-31; Heb. 10:11-17). The Mosaic Covenant did not change the provision of the Abrahamic Covenant but was an added thing for a limited time only—till Christ should come (Gal. 3:17-19).

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:4-17) is the foundation upon which the future millennial kingdom of Christ is to be founded. This is an unconditional covenant and was made between the Lord and David. It promises to David the following: 1) posterity in the Davidic house; 2) a throne symbolic of royal authority; 3) a kingdom, or rule on earth; and 4) certainty of fulfillment for the promises to David "shall be established forever."

Solomon, whose birth God predicted (2 Sam. 7:12), was not promised a perpetual seed, but only assured that 1) he would build "an house for my name (2 Sam. 7:13); 2) his kingdom would be established (2 Sam. 7:12); 3) his throne, i.e. royal authority, would endure forever; and 4) if Solomon sinned, he would be chastised but not deposed. The continuance of Solomon's throne, but not Solomon's seed, shows the

accuracy of the prediction. Most of these items will be fulfilled during the millennial reign of Christ.

THE LAND OF ISRAEL COVENANT

The Land of Israel Covenant (Deut. 30:1-10) provides an expansion upon the land promise found in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3). This is an unconditional covenant and was made between the Lord and the nation of Israel. In Deuteronomy, after two chapters predicting disobedience and judgment, and deportation from the Land, the Lord foretells of ultimate repentance and blessing upon national Israel. The Lord binds Himself to this ultimate destiny for Israel by establishing a covenant that promises the Land to Israel forever. This covenant unfolds as follows: 1) dispersion for disobedience (Deut. 30:1 see also Deut. 28:63-68; 29:22-28). 2) The future repentance of Israel while in dispersion (Deut. 30:2 see also Deut. 28:63-68). 3) The Messiah will gather the remaining exiles and transport them to the Land (Deut. 30:3-6 see also Dan. 12:1; Zech. 2:6; Amos 9:14; Matt. 24:31). 4) The land will be permanently restored to Israel (Deut. 30:5 see also Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 23:3-8; Ezek. 37:21-25). 5) The whole nation of Israel will be converted to their Messiah (Deut. 30:6 see also Hos. 2:14-16; Zech. 12:10-14; Rom. 11:26-27). 6) Judgment of those that oppose Israel (Deut. 30:7 see also Isa. 14:1-2; Joel 3:1-8; Matt. 25:31-46). 7) Israel will experience national blessing and prosperity (Deut. 30:9 see also Amos 9:11-15; Zech. 14:9-21).

THE NEW COVENANT

The New Covenant (Deut. 29:4; 30:6; Isa. 59:20-21; 61:8-9; Jer. 31:31-40; 32:37-40; 50:4-5; Ezek. 11:19-20; 16:60-63; 34:25-26; 36:24-32; 37:21-28; Zech. 9:11; 12:10-14; Heb. 8:1-13; 10:15-18) provides for the yet future spiritual regeneration of Israel in preparation for the millennial kingdom. This is an unconditional covenant and is made between the Lord and the nation of Israel. The New Covenant, as stated in the Old Testament passages I have noted previously is predictive of Israel's new spiritual condition that begins at the end of the tribulation and continues into and throughout the Millennial Kingdom. The New Covenant is applied to the church (Matt. 26:27-28; Luke 22:20; 2 Cor. 3:6), because it provides the forgiveness of sins and a spiritual dynamic that is not just reserved for the nation of Israel.

CONCLUSION

It is through these covenantal relationships that God establishes His relationships with mankind and His elect nation—Israel. It is through the pre-Fall covenants that God relates to Adam and mankind morally, legally, economically, socially, politically, and provides man with his vocational calling through the cultural mandate. The same is true for Israel as God selects a people from among the peoples in order to establish His counter kingdom and culture in this world. God has chosen to govern His relationship with His special people through a series of covenants that bind Him to them forever. History is still unfolding in our own day and God has yet to complete His plan for Israel and humanity in general. One thing we know for sure is that God has bound Himself through His covenants and He will keep His word to Israel and all of mankind. Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity is the primary agent through Whom God works to fulfill the promises of His covenants to all mankind, Israel and the church. Days yet in the future will reveal the final fulfillment of all outstanding promises that God put forth in His covenants thousands of years ago. More than anything in the world we can trust God to keep His promises. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)