

COVENANTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Part VI

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We have seen that the structure of the divine institutions function within the framework of the biblical covenants and dispensations to provide a social structure through which God provides governance to all mankind. I will continue to overview the biblical covenants and look at each one to see if they are still in force today and if they are, how they relate to the church age believer.

THE ADAMIC COVENANT

The Adamic Covenant, which is deduced from Genesis 3:14–19 (see also Hosea 6:7), was a conditional covenant between Adam and God. The basis for Adam’s responsibility was spelled out in Genesis 2:7–9, 15–17 where the Lord told Adam, “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” (Gen. 2:16b–17). We all know that Adam disobeyed God (Gen. 3:6) and cast the entire human race into a sinful and cursed condition (Gen. 3:8–18; 5:3). While this test was a one-time event, nevertheless, the effects of the Fall have continued down throughout history into our own day. The New Testament teaches that, “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) and that Adam’s rebellion brought sin and the curse upon all mankind (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). It is through this covenant that the sinful condition of mankind entered into the world and passed upon all mankind making necessary the work of Christ if individuals are to receive restoration of their relationship with God.

THE NOAHIC COVENANT

Since the Noahic Covenant (Gen. 8:20—9:17) is made between God and all mankind after the Flood, it is still in force today and provides the jurisdiction that makes all mankind responsible to God for their actions in concert with the Edenic Covenant. The sign of the covenant, the rainbow, is a universal sign that has appeared since the Flood and continues to this day, which reinforces God’s claim that the all mankind since the Flood are under its force. An important feature of this covenant is the establishment of civil government and capital punishment as the key feature (Gen. 9:5–7). Since God promised not to destroy the earth again by water (Gen. 9:15), it will be destroyed next time by fire (2 Pet. 3:10–12), the Lord installed civil government, and the sanction of capital punishment, as a way of restraining evil in the interim, because “the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21).

Capital punishment is not just something that evolved over the years within human society and is now falling out of favor, instead it was clearly installed by God to restrain evil. That capital punishment continues throughout our current church age as a tool of civil government is clearly endorsed in the New Testament (Rom. 13:1–7; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:12–14). Clearly capital punishment can be and has been abused since its installation, but God, who knows all things, past or future, instituted it anyway knowing that it would enable the greatest injustice of all time—the crucifixion of His Son.

Human civil government will continue in its present form until the second coming of Christ. At the second advent Christ will personally judge all unbelievers and then set up His righteous dictatorship in which He will reign and rule on earth for 1,000 years. Christ, the God-Man will administer His rule through a hierarchy of human rulers who

will function as vice-regents. For example, David will rule over Israel (Jer. 30:9; Ezk. 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hosea 3:5).

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 an important covenant established by God with Abram through which He works to rebuild what mankind lost in the Fall. Therefore, it could be called a redemptive covenant. We saw that this covenant contains promises made specifically to Abraham, Israel, the seed (including Christ), and some promises are for Gentiles. This is why virtually all aspects of this covenant continue into the present church age and will also carry on into the millennium.

Church age believers are called the spiritual seed of Abraham (Rom. 9:7–8, 24; 15:27; Gal. 3:9, 16, 29) since our salvation is the fulfillment of some of the promises made to Abraham and his descendants, as fulfilled through Christ in Whom we have believed. Further, the promises made in the Abrahamic covenant to Israel have not been abandoned by God (Rom. 11:1–2, 29) and will be fulfilled to the Jewish nation during the millennium. Thus, many of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant continue into our day including the land promises for the Jews and God's promise to bless those who bless Israel (Gen. 12:1–3).

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

The Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 20–23; Deuteronomy) was given exclusively and only to the nation of Israel (Ex. 34:27; 20:2; Deut. 4:1, 6–8, 13, 20, 34, 37, 44; 7:6–8; 10:12–15; 26:16–19; 1 Kings 8:9; Psa. 147:19–20) and was fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus Christ during His first advent (Matt. 5:17; Eph. 2:13–16). This covenant was given to separate Israel from the rest of the nations and as a constitution to instruct them how to live holy lives unto the Lord. When Christ came He fulfilled the Law and thus, broke down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, in Christ (Eph. 2:13–16). 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 New Testament teaches that the Mosaic Law has been done away with by Christ (Rom. 6:14–15; 7:1–6; 1 Cor. 9:20–21; 2 Cor. 3:7–11; Gal. 4:1–7; 5:18; Eph. 2:13–16; Heb. 8:6–7, 13; 10:9). The Church Age believer is not in any way, shape, or form under the obligations of the Mosaic Law, but under the unconditional 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).

Practicing Jews since the time of their national rejection of Christ continue to live under the Mosaic Law as best they can since they obviously do not believe that Jesus has fulfilled the Law. However, continued Jewish observance of the Law is not sanctioned by God because Jesus is in reality the Messiah and one day the nation will accept His Messiahship. Nevertheless, this explains why a portion of Israel attempts to observe the Mosaic Law the best they can in our own day. Also, the prophecies woven throughout the Mosaic Law that have not yet been fulfilled are still valid for today and will be fulfilled either in the tribulation or the millennium.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:4–17) is the foundation upon which the future millennial reign of Christ is grounded. 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.” Even though most of these items will be fulfilled during the millennial reign of Christ, they do not have direct relevance to our current church age.

Some argue that when Christ ascended to heaven that He sat on David’s throne in heaven. However, Jesus said, “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21). This passage makes it clear that Jesus is not on David’s throne but seated at the right-hand of the Father. The New Testament further teaches that during His present session He is making intercession for believers (Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1–2), which explains why He is seated at the Father’s right-hand. It is true that the New Testament argues that Jesus became qualified to sit on David’s throne at His first coming (Acts 2:22–36), nevertheless, Jesus remains in heaven (Acts 3:21) until Israel repents (Acts 3:19) and then will come the “times of refreshing” and the “period of restoration of all things,” (Acts 3:19, 21) which we know as the millennial kingdom when Jesus will reign on David’s throne from Jerusalem. There is no biblical evidence for a present spiritual fulfillment or inaugurated form of the Davidic covenant.

THE LAND OF ISRAEL COVENANT

The Land of Israel Covenant¹ (Deut. 30:1-10) is an unconditional covenant and was made between the Lord and the nation of Israel. The Lord binds Himself to this ultimate destiny for Israel by establishing a covenant that promises the Land to Israel forever. Even though it is still in force for Israel it will not be fulfilled during our current church age. This covenant will be fulfilled for national Israel during the tribulation when 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) and will experience national blessing and prosperity (Deut. 30:9 see also Amos 9:11-15; Zech. 14:9-21) during the millennium. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ The Land of Israel covenant has often been called the Palestinian covenant. I do not like that term since it is not a biblical term. The Bible has never called the land of Israel Palestine. The Bible refers to Israel as the land of Canaan (for example Gen. 11:31; Ex. 6:4; Lev. 14:34; Num. 13:2; Deut. 32:29; etc.) before Israel came and occupied the land at the Exodus in 1400 B.C. From that time on it is called the land of Israel. However, in A.D. 135 when the Roman emperor Hadrian destroyed Jerusalem he wanted to de-Judaize the land of Israel. Hadrian took the name Palestine that was used to refer to what we know today as the Gaza Strip (where the ancient Philistines once lived) and applied it to the entire land of Israel, west of the Jordan River. Yasser Arafat took the name in 1964 and applied it to the Arabs who were living in Israel. Since that time it has come to be closely alienated with Arab opposition to Israel’s ownership of the land, thus, an inappropriate term for God’s covenant promising the land of Israel to the Jews.