

“The Essentials Of Our Faith”

Session VIII
October 31, 2010

A Parenthetical Discussion: The Nature Of An O.T. “COVENANT”!

In our previous study focusing on the Fourth Dispensation we learned that the new “Rule of Life” God revealed to mankind was that of “**Promise**” → **God made promises to mankind and asked him to live by faith in those promises!** In doing so, God chose one man from all of humanity and made repeated “**Promises**” to him concerning his future, the future of his family, the land they would live in, and the future blessing of all mankind. (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-7; 17:1-8)

The pattern of the Fourth Dispensation of “**Promise**” was the same as the previous Dispensations → Mankind “failed” to fulfill the responsibilities of the new revelation from God and this brought “judgment”. In this case the judgment was that of slavery in Egypt for more than 400 years. When the Nation of Israel “cried out” to God at the end of that time, God was gracious and sent deliverance through a chosen “deliverer”, **Moses**! Through this man the next Dispensation, that of “**Law**”, would be revealed.

Before we move to a consideration of the “Dispensation of Law”, we must be careful to emphasize the importance of the basic “**Covenant Promises**” God made to His nation, His “**Chosen People**”, **Israel**! His future dealings with this nation rest upon these promises! While the unfolding of the successive Dispensations have been influenced by the “obedience” or “disobedience” of mankind, the “**Covenant Promises**” **have not!** A “**Covenant**” is a promise which God makes to mankind based upon His eternal plan and purpose. Each promise will be fulfilled whether man is faithful to God’s revelation or not! God is true to Himself and is glorified by keeping His promises to mankind!

However, we live in a culture with a very different mindset! It **does not** understand the basic meaning of a **covenant**! As Christians, we must be sure that we **DO** understand the nature and scope of an Old Testament “Covenant”! We must see God’s promises from **His** perspective, not from a **human** perspective!

Why is the understanding of a Biblical Covenant so important?

- God's dealing with the Jewish nation is based on "Covenant" promises;
(“Is God finished fulfilling His ‘promises’ made to Israel as a people?”)
- God's dealing with the N.T. Christian is based on "Covenant" promises;
(“Are the ‘promises’ God has made to the Christian binding and sure?”)
- God's dealing with the whole world has been and will continue to be based upon His “Covenants” with these two groups – “Israel” and the “Church”!

The Nature and Scope of an O.T. “Covenant”

1. A Normal “Covenant” Between Two Parties:

a. The parties agreed to the terms of the “Covenant”.

--In settling an argument between Isaac and Abimelech over wells of water:

“They said, ‘We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done nothing but good and have sent you away in peace.”
Genesis 26:28-29

b. The parties each made an oath to keep the terms agreed upon and God was called as a witness.

--The oath:

“Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace.”
Genesis 26:30-31

--God called as a witness: (Between Laban and Jacob as he returned home)

“So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me . . . Jacob said, ‘Gather stones.’ So they took stones and made a heap . . . Laban said, ‘This heap is a witness between you and me this day.’ Therefore it was named Galeed (‘the heap of witness’) and Mizpah (‘the watchtower’), for he said, ‘May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent from one another . . . God is witness between you and me.”
Genesis 31:44,46,48-49, 50

c. The parties made a formal ratification of the “Covenant” by a solemn act.

--An external, culturally prescribed, ceremony between Abraham and Abimelech:

“Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.”
Genesis 21:27

--An external, culturally prescribed, ceremony between Isaac and Abimelech:

“Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths . . .”
Genesis 26:30-31

d. The ratified “Covenant” was binding on all parties.

--A person was never to break his vow. God held him responsible to keep it:

“If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.” Numbers 30:2

“When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you . . . You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised.” Deuteronomy 23:21,23

2. A “Unilateral” Covenant Between Two Parties:

a. A “Unilateral” Covenant depends on “One” of the two parties.

“A unilateral covenant, although an agreement between two parties, is binding only on the party making the covenant.” --Paul Enns

b. A “Unilateral” Covenant is unconditional.

“All unconditional covenants – the Abrahamic, the Palestinian, the Davidic – since they rest on the faithfulness of God and not at all on the unfaithfulness of men, are unbreakable by men.” --Lewis Sperry Chafer

c. Scriptural Illustration: The Abrahamic Covenant.

--The terms, oath, and ratification of the agreement depended upon God alone!

“The ratification ceremony described in Genesis 15:9-17 when compared with near Eastern custom indicates that God alone obligated Himself to fulfill the terms of the covenant since only He walked between the pieces of the sacrificial animals. The significance of that is striking: it means that God swore fidelity to His promises and placed the obligation of their fulfillment on Himself alone. Abraham made no such oath; he was in a deep sleep, yet aware of what God promised (see Cleon L. Rogers, Jr.) Clearly the Abrahamic Covenant was not conditioned on anything Abraham would or would not do; its fulfillment in all its parts depends only on God’s doings.” --Charles Ryrie

The Four “Unilateral” Covenants Made With Israel

I. The Abrahamic Covenant:

A. God’s Unilateral Promise: Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:7-21; 17:1-8; 22:17-18.
--No “if” you will; only “I” will!

B. The Basic Elements:

1. “*I will make you a great nation;*”
2. “*I will bless you;*”
3. “*I will make your name great;*”
4. “*You shall be a blessing;*”
5. “*I will bless those who bless you,
and the one who curses you I will curse;*”
6. “*In you all the families of the earth will be blessed;*”
7. “*To your descendants I will give this land (Canaan) . . . forever.*”

C. Present Application:

1. Is the Abrahamic Covenant “conditional” or “unconditional”?
2. Does the Abrahamic Covenant promise permanent existence to Israel as a nation?
 - a. The Amillennialist says, “No!”
 - b. The Premillennialist says, “Yes!”
3. Does the Abrahamic Covenant promise Israel permanent ownership of the “Promised Land”?
 - a. The Amillennialist says, “No!”
 - b. The Premillennialist says, “Yes!”

D. Summary/Conclusion:

“The fact that God promised to give Abraham’s physical descendants the land of Canaan forever and the covenant for an everlasting covenant demands that Israel never perish as a people.”

--Renald Showers

“It should be noted that the parts of the Abrahamic Covenant which have been fulfilled thus far have been fulfilled literally (in accordance with the historical-grammatical method of interpreting the Bible, not in accordance with the allegorical or spiritualizing method). This would seem to indicate that God intends every promise of that covenant to be fulfilled in that manner.”

--Renald Showers

II. The Palestinian Covenant:

A. God's Unilateral Promise: Deuteronomy chapters 28-30.

“ . . . the Palestinian Covenant is the oft-repeated declaration by Jehovah, wholly unconditional, that the land promised to Abraham . . . would be Abraham's forever.”
--Lewis Sperry Chafer

B. The Time of the Promise:

“God established the Palestinian Covenant at the end of Israel's 40 years of wilderness wanderings, just a short time before the nation was to invade Canaan (Deut. 29:5-8). . . . The parties of the covenant were God, the 'new' generation of Israelites which was to invade Canaan, and succeeding generations of the nation.”
--Renald Showers

C. The Basic Elements:

1. The Nation would go into “judgments” where they would be dispossessed of the “Promised Land.” (Gen. 15:13-16 → Egypt; Jer. 25:11-12 → Babylon; Deut. 28:63-68; 30:1-3 → the Nations, “to the ends of the earth”).
2. Two “returns” have taken place: From Egypt; from Babylon.
3. A future “return” is promised to Israel from her present “dispersion” into the nations of the earth, Deut. 30:3-5. God will “gather” the scattered Jews from all over the earth!
4. A future “repentance” is predicted for Israel, Deut. 30:1-3.
5. A future “regeneration” is promised for Israel as a nation, Deut. 30:6,8 .
6. A future “judgment” is promised for Israel's enemies, Deut. 30:7.
7. A future “prosperity” is promised to Israel as a nation, Deut. 30:9.

D. Summary/Conclusion:

“The ultimate fulfillment of these promises with Israel is still future. Moses indicated that fulfillment will not take place until all the ‘curse’ of Deut. 28 has been completed and Israel has genuinely returned to God and obeyed Him (Deut. 30:1-3). It is a fact that literal Israel has not yet returned to God as a nation and is not now obeying Him. . . . it is evident that all the ‘curse’ of Deut. 28 has not yet been completed for Israel even in this present century.”
--Renald Showers

“This, therefore, is another guarantee of Israel's permanent existence as a nation. God has chastened Israel severely for centuries because of its unfaithfulness to Him, but He will never destroy its existence as a nation.”
--Renald Showers

III. The Davidic Covenant:

A. God's Unilateral Promise: II Samuel 7:8-16.

--Related Passages: II Sam. 23:5; II Chron. 7:18; 21:7; Psa. 89:3-4, 28-29, 34-37; Jer. 33:19-26.

"It should be noted that God stated no conditions in the content of the Davidic Covenant when He established it with David. This indicates that the Davidic Covenant is unconditional in nature. It depends totally upon the faithfulness of God for the fulfillment of its promises."

--Renald Showers

B. The Time of the Promise:

- David was established as King over the entire nation of Israel;
- Nathan the Prophet had told David that Solomon, his son, would build the Temple;
- Nathan also announced the "Covenant" God would establish with David and his descendants.

C. The Basic Elements:

1. David was promised "a house" that would endure forever!
"Your house . . . shall endure before Me forever," II Sam. 7:16.
--"The term house referred to David's physical line of descent. Thus, God was promising that David's line of descent would endure forever."
--Renald Showers
2. David was promised "a kingdom" that would endure forever!
"Your kingdom . . . shall endure before Me forever," II Sam. 7:16.
--"God thereby pledged that David's kingdom would never pass away permanently, even though it might not function at all times."
--Renald Showers
3. David was promised "a throne" that would be established forever!
"Your throne will be established forever," II Sam. 7:16.

D. Summary/Conclusion:

1. The Amillennialist: Believes that Christ fulfills the promises now during this present age before His Second Coming. Christ is presently ruling over the Church or human hearts from His position in Heaven. This is a "spiritual" Kingdom!
2. The Premillennialist: Believes that Christ will fulfill these promises in the future when He returns to earth in His Second Coming. He will establish a literal, earthly, political Kingdom and reign on the Throne of David for 1,000 years! This is a "physical" Kingdom!

IV. The “New” Covenant:

A. God’s Unilateral Promise: Jeremiah 31:31; 50:4-5; Isaiah 59:20-21;
Ezekiel 34:25-30; 37:21-28.

--Note: It is important to notice that this covenant is established with the Nation of Israel and not with the Gentiles.

“Since God gave the Mosaic Law only to the people of Israel (Lev. 26:46; Deut. 4:8) and not to the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14), and since He promised to establish the New Covenant with the descendants of those to whom He gave the Mosaic Law Covenant, then the New Covenant must also be with the people of Israel, the physical descendants of Jacob.” --R. Showers

B. The Basic Elements:

1. He promised regeneration to the Nation, including a new heart!

“I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people,” Jer. 31:33.

2. He promised forgiveness of sin!

“ . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more,” Jer. 31:34.

3. He promised the indwelling of the Holy Spirit!

“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances,” Ezek. 36:27.

4. He promised universal knowledge of Jehovah!

“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the LORD . . .” Jer. 31:34.

5. He promised that Israel would obey Him genuinely from the heart!

“And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always . . . and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me,” Jer. 32:39, 40.

6. God promised national blessing in abundance!

“I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul. For thus says the LORD, ‘Just as I brought all this great disaster on this people, so I am going to bring on them all the good that I am promising them, Jer. 32:41-42.

“Paul stated that God would not repent (change His mind) concerning this future calling for Israel which He announced in the Old Testament (Rom. 11:29). In other words, God’s calling for Israel to enter the New Covenant relationship with Him in the future is irrevocable. It must happen!”

--Renald Showers