



#### IV. THE PERSPECTIVES OF PROPHECY

##### A. The Perspective of Covenants

1. Foundational information on covenants
  - a. The word *covenant* is found in the Bible in one form or another (covenant, covenants, covenanted, covenantbreakers) 300 times.
  - b. Generally speaking, a covenant is a formal and solemn agreement between two parties to do or not to do a specific thing.
  - c. In the Bible, covenants may be classified as to participants.
    - (1) Human covenants are made between two earthly parties, as between two men or two nations.
    - (2) Divine covenants are those covenants which God makes with men.
  - d. Divine covenants may be classified according to the conditions of the covenant from the human side.
    - (1) A conditional covenant is one which is promised to be fulfilled on the condition that man does his part. If man fails to do his part, God is not bound to do His.
    - (2) An unconditional covenant is one which is entirely based on the faithfulness of God and does not rely on man doing his part. It is a covenant of promise (Ephesians 2:12).
  - e. One of the confusing things about the covenants is the large number of ways in which they are used. Besides the various ways in which the covenants are used in the scriptures, covenants play an important part in two different theological systems: dispensationalism and covenant theology.
    - (1) Most teachers of dispensationalism recognize that most of the various dispensations have a special covenant attached to them. These covenants are usually called covenants in the Bible and they are connected to how the Lord dealt with mankind during that dispensation and are usually given at the beginning of the dispensational period. Here are some of the dispensations with their respective covenants.
      - a) The dispensation of innocence and the Edenic Covenant (Genesis 2:16-17)
      - b) The dispensation of human government and the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9:8-17)
      - c) The dispensation of law and the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 24:1-8)
    - (2) Covenant theology is a theological system that arose within the framework of Calvinism during the sixteenth century. Covenant theology establishes God's relationship with mankind upon two or three covenants. These covenants define God's promises toward man and man's obligations toward God. The covenants control the working of God in history and redemption.



2. Identifying the biblical covenants
  - a. The Noahic Covenant
    - (1) The recipients of the covenant
      - a) Noah (Genesis 6:18)
      - b) Noah and his family (Genesis 9:8-9)
      - c) Their seed after them (Genesis 9:9)
      - d) The living creatures (Genesis 9:10)
    - (2) The details of the covenant
      - a) The invitation of the covenant—"come into the ark" (Genesis 6:18)
      - b) The promise of the covenant—"neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Genesis 9:11)
    - (3) The conditions of the covenant—If there was a condition to this covenant, it was Noah entering the ark. Otherwise, this was an unconditional covenant and God's promise holds true regardless of man's faithfulness.
    - (4) The token of the covenant—the rainbow (Genesis 9:12-17)
  - b. The Abrahamic Covenant
    - (1) The recipients of the covenant (Galatians 3:16)
      - a) Abram (Genesis 15:18)
      - b) Abram's seed (Genesis 17:7); this went through Isaac and not Ishmael (Genesis 17:19, 21)
      - c) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 17:19, 21; Exodus 2:24)
      - d) The sons of Jacob (Exodus 2:24; Exodus 6:4-5)
    - (2) The details of the covenant
      - a) Land (Genesis 15:18-21; Genesis 17:8)
      - b) Seed (Genesis 17:1-7)
      - c) Blessing (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 28:14; Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8)
    - (3) The conditions of the covenant—unconditional
      - a) God required a sacrifice to be made (Genesis 15:9-11)
        - i) The animals to be sacrificed (Genesis 15:9)
        - ii) The method of sacrifice (Genesis 15:10)
        - iii) Abram's protection of the sacrifice (Genesis 15:11)
        - iv) Note: Jeremiah 34:18-19 refers to this type of covenant when two parties walk between a divided sacrifice. The difference here is that God passed between the pieces without Abram. As such, this was an unconditional covenant. God promised to fulfil it regardless of the faithfulness of Abram and his seed.
      - b) God made His covenant with Abram (Genesis 15:12-17)
        - i) Abram went into a deep sleep (Genesis 15:12).
        - ii) God spoke unto Abram (Genesis 15:13-16).
        - iii) God passed between the pieces of the sacrifice (Genesis 15:17).
    - (4) The token of the covenant—circumcision (Genesis 17:10-14)



- c. The Mosaic Covenant
  - (1) The recipients of the covenant
    - a) Moses (Exodus 34:27)
    - b) The children of Israel (Exodus 19:5-6)
    - c) Strangers (Isaiah 56:6)
  - (2) The details of the covenant
    - a) Israel would be a peculiar treasure (Exodus 19:5-6).
    - b) God would do marvels in driving out the heathen and planting Israel (Exodus 34:10-17).
    - c) God would give provisions in the land of promise (Leviticus 26:1-13).
    - d) God would bless Israel above all people (Deuteronomy 7:12-26; Deuteronomy 8:18; Deuteronomy 29:9).
    - e) God adorned Israel with great beauty in the sight of the nations (Ezekiel 16:8-14).
    - f) It was never intended to replace the Abrahamic covenant (Galatians 3:17).
  - (3) The conditions of the covenant—conditional
    - a) The promises of this covenant were physical in nature and its fulfillment was conditional hinging upon Israel's obedience.
    - b) The specifics of obedience certainly included the ten commandments, but was also much broader encompassing all the commandments given by God to Moses and passed along to the people (likely identified as the book of the covenant).
    - c) The physical blessings could and would be removed in the case of Israel's refusal to keep the covenant (Leviticus 26:14-39; Deuteronomy 4:23-40; Deuteronomy 29:25-29).
    - d) When Israel disobeyed this covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant spared the seed (Leviticus 26:42, 44; 2 Kings 13:23).
  - (4) The token of the covenant
    - a) The book of the covenant (Exodus 24:7; 1 Kings 8:21; 2 Kings 23:2-3, 21)
    - b) The blood of the covenant (Exodus 24:8)
    - c) The tables of the covenant (Deuteronomy 9:9, 11, 15; Hebrews 9:4)
    - d) The ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 10:8; Hebrews 9:4)
- d. The Levitical Covenant
  - (1) The recipients of the covenant
    - a) Originally given to Phinehas, the son of Levi, and his seed after him (Numbers 25:10-13)
    - b) Eventually seemed to broaden to include all Levites (Nehemiah 13:29; Malachi 2:4-6)
    - c) This seems to extend to the nation as a whole in the future (Ezekiel 34:25; Ezekiel 37:26)



- (2) The details of the covenant (Numbers 25:12-13; Malachi 2:4-6)
  - a) Peace (Numbers 25:12)
  - b) Everlasting priesthood (Numbers 25:13)
- (3) The conditions of the covenant
  - a) It would be wise to be careful here, but it seems like this covenant was both unconditional and conditional.
  - b) The Levitical failure (Malachi 2:8-9) opened the door for Christ to come after the order of Melchizedek and for the nation as a whole to eventually be a nation of priests.
- e. The Davidic Covenant
  - (1) The recipients of the covenant
    - a) David (2 Samuel 23:1-5; 2 Chronicles 7:18; 2 Chronicles 21:7; Psalm 89:3, 28, 34, 39; Psalm 132:11-12)
    - b) His seed after him (2 Chronicles 7:18; 2 Chronicles 13:5)
  - (2) The details of the covenant
    - a) A continuation of the seed sitting upon the throne (2 Chronicles 7:18)
    - b) A light unto David's seed for ever (2 Chronicles 21:7)
    - c) Sure mercies (Psalm 89:28)
  - (3) The conditions of the covenant—unconditional to David (Psalm 89:28, 34)
- f. The New Covenant
  - (1) The recipients of the covenant
    - a) Historically and primarily, the New Covenant was promised to the Jewish people.
      - i) Jeremiah 31:31 is very specific. It will be made with the house of Israel (the northern kingdom) and with the house of Judah (the southern kingdom).
      - ii) There is no way to spiritualize this promise and keep the meaning intact.
      - iii) This was the covenant Paul had in mind in Romans 11:25-29.
    - b) However, the Gentiles of this age have been enabled to partake of some of the privileges of the new covenant through the cross of Christ. Note: Generally speaking, Gentiles are excluded (Romans 9:4; Ephesians 2:12). Only in Christ do we partake of the benefit of the New Covenant.
  - (2) The details of the covenant
    - a) Divine fellowship (Hebrews 8:10)
      - i) The laws of God will be put into the minds of the Jews and written in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). Ezekiel 37:26-27 refers to this “new heart” and “new spirit” that will cause them to walk in God's statutes and keep His judgments.
      - ii) Israel's relationship with God will be perfect.
        - (a) He will be their God and they will be His people (Jeremiah 31:33).



- (b) This is a common expectation in the Old Testament (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 24:7; Jeremiah 30:22; Jeremiah 31:1; Jeremiah 32:38; Ezekiel 11:20; Ezekiel 37:27; Zechariah 13:9) and is finally fulfilled in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:3) when all the righteous will be included.
    - b) Divine knowledge (Hebrews 8:11; Isaiah 2:3; Jeremiah 31:34)
      - i) They will all know the Lord.
      - ii) This provision does not apply to the age of grace since all do not know Him today and this demonstrates the fact that the new covenant will not be completely fulfilled until it is fulfilled in the Jewish people—the people to whom it was originally promised.
    - c) Divine reconciliation (Hebrews 8:12)
      - i) God will be merciful to their unrighteousness.
      - ii) Their iniquities and sins will be completely forgiven (Jeremiah 31:34). Romans 11:25-27 shows how this promise directly applies to Israel.
    - d) Divine replacement (Hebrews 8:13)
      - i) The introduction of the new declares the first to be old.
      - ii) The old is ready to vanish away.
- 3. Unveiling the false theology of covenant theology
  - a. The three suggested covenants
    - (1) Covenant of Works: this is also called the Edenic Covenant. When God created man, He entered into a covenant with Adam (Genesis 2:16-17). According to covenant theology, this covenant with Adam had three parts:
      - a) A promise of eternal life upon the condition of perfect obedience during a probationary period
      - b) The promise of death upon disobedience to the covenant
      - c) The enjoyment of the tree of life forever upon obedient completion of the probationary period
    - (2) Covenant of Redemption: this is the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son concerning the salvation of mankind. This covenant determined that sinful man would not be left to utter destruction because of sin and it determined the roles played by each person of the Godhead in redeeming a remnant.
    - (3) Covenant of Grace: this covenant is based on the covenant of redemption and it is established in time. It is God's agreement with man to save those He has enabled to believe in Him; that is, the elect, who are those that the Father has given to the Son (John 6:37). Whereas the covenant of works applied only to the dispensation of innocence when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, the covenant of grace is the means of salvation in every other dispensation, from the fall of man until the end of time.



- b. Good points of covenant theology
  - (1) God has clearly chosen to deal with mankind through a series of covenants.
  - (2) God has certainly had an eternal plan for man that was established before the foundation of the world.
- c. Criticism of covenant theology
  - (1) Although God deals with mankind throughout history by the use of covenants, none of the three covenants in covenant theology are ever named in the scriptures as covenants.
  - (2) Covenant theology is based on Calvinistic theology. It is seen as an attempt to soften the harshness of early Calvinistic teaching. However, the covenant of grace is based on God's choice to save the elect while determining the eternal judgment of the non-elect.
  - (3) Covenant theology overemphasizes the making of covenants in the life of the elect. The Puritans and others built all relationships on the idea of covenants. There is good and bad in this approach.
  - (4) Covenant theology totally misunderstands the purpose of baptism.
    - a) Since the Jews were to come into the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant by circumcision, it became a doctrine of covenant theologians that New Testament believers come into the blessings of the covenant by baptism.
    - b) Since no one wanted their children left out of the covenant, this was then used to support infant baptism
    - c) Since all the people of a nation were expected to be baptized, this led to the idea of a government which combined church and state. As a result of this development, those who refused to baptize their babies were not only wrong theologically, they also threatened the unity of the government and brought divine pleasure on the nation. This explains why the doctrine of believer's baptism was so vehemently opposed in both Catholic and Protestant countries. Those who would not baptize infants were seen as destroying the glue that held society together and bringing the wrath of God on them. Many Baptists died because of this belief.

## B. The Perspective of Dispensations

- 1. We have already dealt much with the biblical doctrine and practice of rightly dividing the word of truth and will merely point the student back to those notes.
- 2. However, it should be understood that dispensations and covenants do not contradict when viewed through the lens of the Bible, but rather mutually strengthen the other perspective.