

Israel – God’s Super Sign of End Times

Covenants - The Framework of Prophetic Interpretation

To understand divinely inspired Bible prophecy that forewarned Israel “what shall befall thy people in the latter days” (Daniel 8:14), it is necessary to understand God’s unconditional covenants with Israel and to ascertain what is meant by the *latter days*. In his book *Understanding God’s Program Through the Ages*, Evangelist Ken Symes says, “If we are to be Biblical in our theological framework, we must accept that the Bible teaches both covenants and dispensations.” Biblical covenants deal with God’s relationship to man, whereas the emphasis of dispensations is more on the time element. As you come to recognize that all other truths emanate from this umbilical cord of truth, the word of God will come alive with understanding.”ⁱ

The theological battle lines of controversy between these two divinely created processes of covenants and dispensations are sharply divided. On one side is Covenant Theology and on the other side is Dispensationalism. Covenant theology proposes that the Church is the continuing covenanted community of God’s people throughout history. It consists of all people who have had the Covenant of Grace relationship with God regardless of the period of history in which they lived. Thus, the church is the same throughout history. These concepts have led those who adhere to Covenant Theology to the following conclusion: Since the church consists of all people who have entered the Covenant of Grace relationship with God, then the Church consists of both Old Testament Israel believers and the New Testament Church, making them essentially the same.”ⁱⁱ

Renald Showers in his classic book *There Really is a Difference*, points out the differences between the Church and Israel.

1. Israel was a nation. The Church is not a nation.
2. Israel had a common language. The Church has many languages.
3. Israel was an earthly political state, with a capital city, government, and rulers. The Church is not.
4. Israel had a national army. The Church does not have a national army.
5. Jews are genetic descendants of Abraham, entering a covenant relationship through circumcision. Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel had to be circumcised and lose their gentile identity adopting the practice of the national and religious laws of the nation of Israel.
6. Both Gentiles and Jews become members of the “one new man” body of the Church by faith without renouncing or losing their distinctive Jewish or Gentile identities (Eph. 2:13-16; 3:1-6; Acts 15:1-29).
7. Israel contained both believers and unbelievers. The Church is comprised of only believers (Acts 2:47; 10:1-2; 44-47; 11:13-18).
8. The scriptures never called the saved Jews of Old Testament Israel the *Church of God* in contrast with the unsaved Jews of Israel. Scriptures do identify both saved Jews and saved Gentiles as *the Church of God*.
9. Israel and the Church were never and are not the same.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Renald Showers goes on to develop the sharp disagreement over the Mosaic Law. Is it for the Church today? Covenant Theologians advocate that while believers are not under the ceremonial aspects of the Law, they are under the moral Laws (Ten Commandments). So, therefore the two alternatives are to be under that Law or to be Lawless. Dispensational theology holds the position that Christians are not under any aspect of the Mosaic Law, because although the Law had three aspects, civil for Israel’s civilians, ceremonial for worship practices, and moral for daily way of life, the Law functioned as an indivisible unit. Thus, to place oneself under one aspect of the Law was to obligate oneself to be under the entire Law. (Gal. 3:19; 5:3; James 2:10). Dispensationalists acknowledge that the moral absolutes are about God’s character and like Him are eternal throughout all time. Prior to the institution of the Law on Mt. Sinai, scripture lists Abel,

Enoch, and Abraham as key examples of pre-Law faith relationships. God placed Noah and Job, who lived before the Law in the same category as righteous Daniel who lived during the Mosaic Law. (Ezekiel 14:14,20). The moral absolutes of God have not changed, but the administration of those absolutes has changed with the giving of the Law to a national Israel and the administration of moral law has been replaced since the cross of Christ by the Law of Christ for living. For example, adultery and idolatry are no longer punishable by death (Ex. 22:20; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). There is another alternative to the either-or option of Covenant Theology Law keepers or Law-less. There is liberty under the Law of Christ which is the perfect Law of Liberty (James 1:25) and is based on love empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:19; 5:18; 5:22-23). The Mosaic Law was abolished by Jesus' physical death (Eph. 2:15,16). The Grace Covenant theology tends to be lacking in its understanding of grace, particularly regarding their mistaken belief in "irresistible grace," which posits that only the elect are saved without considering their free will. Additionally, it falls short in recognizing the Grace restrained liberty found within the Law of Christ.

Grace not only saves whosoever believes, but that same grace empowers and motivates every believer to be law-abiding. How can a non-believer be overcome with irresistible grace, but a believer grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit? Has "sovereign" Grace become less "sovereign" after salvation? Many epistles deal with these carnal believers and warn of church discipline, divine chastisement and even death. A preacher and author who is highly respected for his accurate interpretation of scripture explained that this is "a wrong definition of God's sovereignty." Grace in the life of a believer means that the obligatory "have to" obey is replaced by an internal new mind of Christ through the Spirit, that "wants to" please Him and grows in grace as one grows in scriptural knowledge of Christ and in fellowship with Him. (Romans 6:14-15; 7:4,6; Gal. 2:19; 3:23-25). Oh, there is still obedience to commandments – the Law of Christ not the Law of Moses. The Israelites may have done a better job at keeping the 613 commands of the Law of Moses than Christians do at keeping the Law of Christ. When have you ever heard a sermon on Jesus imperative "Keep my commandments," that listed or accounted for how many commandments and what they are? There are hundreds.

The Covenants were initiated by God with Israel. Paul made it clear that he was burdened for the salvation of his brethren, "Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and **the covenants**, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" Romans 9:4 Paul also made clear that these covenants were not made with Gentiles, but that they are made near? "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). We in the Dispensation of Grace ie: the Church Age benefit from the spiritual provisions of the New Covenant. "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Eph. 2:14). Ken Symes points out an important detail, "All of the biblical covenants were given in what we know as the Old Testament economy. Thus, when we find covenants mentioned in the New Testament, they always relate to the covenants (with Israel) found in the Old Testament."^{iv}

The Abrahamic Covenant is the Seed Covenant of the other three unconditional Covenants. Mark Robinson, former Executive Director of JAM thoroughly explains that "The proper understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant will establish the seeker of biblical understanding on solid biblical ground as they study the Bible. There are three basic promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. These promises concern the land of Israel, the Jewish people and Messiah, and God's plan of salvation for the world. Throughout history these areas have been the focus of satanic attack through both the secular world and the religious world." John Walvoord astutely commented, "The covenant of God with Abraham is one of the important and determinative revelations of Scripture. It furnishes the key to the entire Old Testament and reaches for its fulfillment into the New."^v

The issue, in a word, is the question of whether Israel as a nation and as a race has a prophesied future. A literal interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant involves the permanent existence of Israel as a nation and the fulfillment of the promise that the land should be their everlasting possession.”

I go one step further, in my understanding of the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant, it is the most important and determinative revelation of Scripture and furnishes the key to the entire Old Testament and New Testament. In fact, the proper interpretation of the Abrahamic Covenant is imperative for a correct understanding of the word of God.

Abrahamic Covenant

When God told Abram whose name was changed to Abraham (Genesis 17:5) to leave Ur of the Chaldees (present-day Iraq – Genesis 11:31; 12:1) to go to the land we now know as Israel, He made some promises to Abraham, which would be passed down to his descendants Isaac (Genesis 17:19) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14). Jacob had twelve sons who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 49). It is with the descendants of the twelve tribes, the Jewish people, or Israel, that the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant reside. The Abrahamic Covenant and its promises are found in Genesis 12:1-3:

*2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:
3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

It is important that we understand the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant. The “I wills” of these verses establish God as the guarantor of these promises. The fulfillment of these promises are as certain and solid as God’s character.

Cutting a Covenant

At this time, it was common for two parties to enter into an agreement through the “cutting of a covenant.” An animal was cut in half and laid in a row and the two parties of the covenant passed between the parts signifying the agreement is binding on both parties. In the process of establishing the covenant with Abraham, God had Abraham take animals and divide them in half and lay them out (Genesis 15:9-10), When the time came for the covenant to be ratified, we are told “...a deep sleep fell upon Abram...and it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In that same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram...” (Genesis 15:12; 17-18). The smoking furnace and burning lamp are God’s manifest glory going through the divided animals alone, without Abraham. When we are told that “*the Lord made a covenant with Abraham,*” it is signifying that the covenant is exclusively based on God’s promise and not at all on Abraham or his descendants, meeting any conditions for these promises to be fulfilled. There are three guarantees to Abraham in this Covenant. 1. “I will make of thee a great nation.” Descendants would comprise the nation of Israel who would be innumerable (15:5; 32:12) 2. “I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.” Abraham’s name is prominent throughout the entire canon of scripture (Hebrews 11:8-19) and looked to as a spiritual father of the three monotheistic faiths. 3. “and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” A descendant from Abraham would be the source of blessing even to the Gentiles through the Gospel of Jesus. (Galatians 3:6-9) Genesis 3:15 is often called the *proto-evangelion* or the first Gospel in that “the seed of the woman,” would destroy Satan. That first seminal text was further promised to come through Abraham’s seed. Three provisions within this covenant were reiterated throughout Genesis.”^{vi} (Land, Seed, Blessing)

1. The Land Promise

Prior to the faith of Abraham prompting God’s declaration of imputed righteousness in (15:6) there was the promise of land in God’s initial encounter with him, (12:7) in which God promised Abraham land, “unto a land that

I will shew thee.” God had a specific location in mind, a “*land that I will show thee.*” Upon his arrival in the “land of Canaan,” “the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land.”

The land Abraham went to is the land of Israel. This land is spoken of as the “*holy land,*” Zechariah 2:12. It has been set apart by God for a distinctly spiritual purpose.

“Scripture has at least 170 references to the land that God gave to the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God promised the land of Canaan to the Jews as an unconditional covenant. Fifty-five times the Bible records that God confirmed the gift with an oath. Twelve of those times He stated that the covenant was everlasting.”¹ It is abundantly clear from the Bible that the Jewish people have been given the land of Israel from God and are the rightful owners.

The present-day claim by the Palestinians that they have rights to land in Israel is a fabrication whose source is satanic. Historically, there has never been a Palestinian nation or a Palestinian people. In 1946, a leading Arab historian, Princeton University history professor Philip Hitti, stated the pan-Arab view at the time when he decried the term “Palestinian” because it referred to Jews. “There is no such thing as Palestine in history, absolutely not,” he asserted.”^{vii}

John Walvoord argues that; “Those who interpret this prophecy in a non-literal sense (Covenant theologians) point to Hebrews 11:9-10, “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” All serious interpreters of Scripture agree that Abram had an eternal hope of dwelling forever in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). This eternal hope, however, does not satisfy the Old Testament description of a literal land in human history. Abram had both a future temporal hope – the land – as well as an eternal hope. It is not too much to say that the interpretation of Genesis 12:7 determines in large measure the prophetic interpretation of the rest of the Bible. The many references to the Promised Land throughout the Old Testament should guide as to its interpretation here.”^{viii} In Genesis 13: 14-17 after Lot had chosen the well-watered plain near Sodom and Gomorrah, God told Abram, “And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.” God later promised Jacob as he fled from Esau, “ I *am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed” and repeated the third promise that He made to Abram, ...in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed... and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done *that* which I have spoken to thee of” (28:13-15). Jacob’s last words were to be buried with his fathers “in the land of Canaan which Abraham bought.” (49:29-32)

Abraham’s descendants established ownership of the land through God's promise and Abraham's purchase.

God remembered His promise to Abraham when the Israelites were suffering slavery in Egypt. “And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Exodus 2:24; 3:8).

God promised Moses that the land was their destiny and gave the boundaries of it. “I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee” (Exodus 23:20,30,31). Moses' last words to Israel were their obedience to the Lord would preserve their prosperity and presence in the land and that their

disobedience would result in their expulsion from the land. Yet, He promised to restore them to the land. “the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it” (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

The insistence of the world that the Jewish people have to give up parts of the Holy Land is rooted in Satan’s war against God, the Messiah, and the Jewish people. God’s promise of the land to the Jewish people will be fulfilled one day. This fulfillment awaits the coming of Messiah Jesus at the end of the Tribulation period when He destroys the enemies of God and Israel and sets up His kingdom in the land of Israel.

2. The Seed Promise

God’s promise to Abraham was that He would make him “a great nation.”

When Abraham doubted God’s promise, and Ishmael was born through Hagar, Genesis 16, God rejected Ishmael as the son of promise. It would be through Sarah that the promised covenantal son of Abraham, Isaac, would be born, Genesis 17:9. Likewise, when twins were in the womb of Rebecca, Isaac’s wife, God rejected Esau as the child of covenantal promise. He would establish Jacob as the child through whom the promise would come to pass, Genesis 28:13-14. Jacob would have twelve sons and from them would come the tribes of Israel and the Jewish people. Of all the families of Judah, the privilege of Messianic lineage, would reside with the family of David, Psalm 89.

The “unique” seed of Israel, the promised Messiah and Savior, would come through the tribe of Judah, Genesis 49:10.

When such a small group of people (today less than 1/2 of one percent of the world’s population) is unrelentingly persecuted, there can be no logical explanation other than a satanic attempt to destroy God’s plan. The same can be said for all the attempts to destroy the Jewish people before Messiah’s birth, death, and resurrection. Satan wanted to prevent Jesus from coming into the world to pay the penalty for mankind’s sins. Through Haman, Antiochus Epiphanes, Herod, and others, Satan attempted to annihilate the Jewish people to prevent Jesus from coming into the world. God’s promises will stand though regardless of theological or political gerrymandering. One day, Jesus, the “unique” seed of Abraham, will rule and reign over the re-gathered children of Israel.

3. The Blessing Promise

Genesis 12:3 The promise is to Jew and Gentile – “all families of the earth will be blessed.” The overriding intent of this blessing is salvation will come to the entire world.

During the time of Abraham and the age of the Mosaic Law, there were few Gentiles recorded in Scripture who came to a saving knowledge of Israel’s God and Redeemer. Some of the most well-known ones are the Gentile women found in the Messianic line – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth. With the birth of the Church at Pentecost after the ascension of Jesus, many more Gentiles would come into the family of God. Today, Gentile believers far outnumber Jewish believers in Jesus, therefore the western church is half “of twain made He one new man.”

The future Tribulation period promises an ingathering of Jews and Gentile into the family of God, perhaps in numbers that have never been realized in the history of the world, Revelation 7:9-10, 14. The salvation of God, through the work of Messiah Jesus, touches the entire human race. Both Jewish and Gentile peoples, “all families,” will know the blessing of forgiveness of sin and a relationship with God through their acceptance of God’s salvation in the finished work of Jesus in dying for the sins of the world and rising from the grave.

Much time has been spent on the next covenant The Land Covenant It is NOT the Palestinian Covenant as most pre-1948 Covenant and Dispensational commentators mislabeled it. 1948 changed everything. ISRAEL IS REAL.

The Next Covenant is the Davidic Covenant – 2 Samuel 7:11,13,16; Jeremiah 33:20,21, 35-37 Matthew and Luke document the royal lineage of Jesus and His rightly title of King of Israel. The wisemen studying Genesis 49:10 came to see the one born King of the Jews. Jesus will reign for 1000 years on the throne in the New Temple in the Millennium.

The last of the unconditional covenants is the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-40; Hebrews 8:6-13).

This covenant provides salvation for all but is still to be ratified by the whole house of Israel and to the House of Judah as we will see at the end of the Tribulation (Jer:31:31; Zechariah 13:8,9; Romans 11:25).

Conclusion

The rest of the Bible, from Genesis 12:4 through Revelation 22:21, is, in essence, commentary on how God brings to pass the three basic promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant – the land, the seed, the blessing – are unfolded throughout the rest of the Word of God and history. To err in your understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant is to make shipwreck of the rest of the Bible. Properly understanding the Abrahamic Covenant will give you a framework from which you can start to build a good, solid, understanding of Scripture. Let's go study as one who rightly divides the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15.

Sources: <https://www.jewishawareness.org/the-abrahamic-covenant/>

Article Endnote

1 <http://www.differentspirit.org/resources/land.php>

ⁱ Ibid., p 21

ⁱⁱ There Really is a Difference, Renald Showers, Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990, P 183

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., pp185,186

^{iv} Ibid., p 19

^v Every Prophecy of the Bible , John F. Walvoord, Chariot Victor Publishing, Colorado Springs, CO, 1999, p., 26

^{vi} Israel's Messenger, Abrahamic Covenant, Mark Robinson, Aug 1, 2012,

^{vii} Ibid.,

^{viii} Every Prophecy of the Bible , John F. Walvoord, Chariot Victor Publishing, Colorado Springs, CO, 1999, p., 27