EVERLASTING LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS

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The Value of the Study to the Student

The study of the biblical covenants will have an enhancing effect on you. Your ability to understand the Bible in particular, and God's dealings with humanity in general, depends on how well you understand the biblical covenants. Additionally, you will see the character of God displayed in the biblical covenants. God's self-revelation in His covenantal dealings will give you cause to worship and praise Him for acts – acts on mankind's behalf that were utterly unmerited but graciously undertaken.

The Role of the Covenants

The biblical covenants are a record of God's unfolding plan of salvation. The role of each covenant is essential in the divine fulfillment of His salvific purpose toward sinners. As the study progresses, in coincidence with progressive revelation in Scripture generally and the covenants in particular, you will see the relationship of them with each other in the plan of redemption.

The Interconnectedness of the Covenants

As hinted at in the previous section, the student of the covenants must realize that the biblical covenants are interconnected. "One must not keep the promises they contain separate from each other as mutually exclusive sets of covenant provisions (like distinct post office boxes). Rather, throughout the Old Testament God is weaving a beautiful covenant tapestry, weaving each new covenant into the fabric of the former covenants."[1]

[1] Michael Grisanti, *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Fall 1999.

The Character of God is shown in the Covenants

All of the Bible is God's self-disclosure. The biblical covenants play their part in revealing Yahweh's perfections, or attributes. We may at this point name some of the perfections we will encounter in our engagement with the covenants. Yahweh shows His sovereignty, love, grace, mercy, power, wisdom, holiness, righteousness, omniscience, and more.

The Identity of the Covenants

The biblical covenants have been affirmed by premillennialists as being five or six covenants: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Priestly, Davidic, and New. The premillennial view is distinguished from classic Reformed theology, which maintains that there is essentially one overarching covenant in Scripture – the Covenant of Grace.

The Meaning of the Word Covenant

Covenantal language is seldom, if ever, used in ordinary conversations today. The term *covenant* is usually reserved for marriage vows and neighborhood homeowners associations. The biblical use of *covenant* is important for us to distinguish.

The employment of the word *covenant* in the Old Testament may refer to an agreement between men (between two parties). Both enter into the agreement voluntarily, resulting in a partnership relationship. This type of covenant is seen between David and Jonathan (**1 Samuel 18:3-4**), between families such as Jacob and Laban (**Genesis 31:54**), and between nations such as Israel and the Canaanites (**Exodus 23:32; 34:12, 15**). Similar terminology describes the marriage covenant (**Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14**) or international agreements (**1 Kings 20:34**).

These covenants are made between two parties where there is basic parity. This is not the case with covenants between the Creator and creature.

"A covenant is a formal agreement between two parties with obligations and regulations. The vast majority of covenants in the Bible (1) are unconditional or

nonnullifiable in that once the covenant is ratified, the covenant must be fulfilled, and (2) are referred to as everlasting. The unconditional covenants include the Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly, Davidic, and New Covenants. The one conditional and temporary covenant is the Mosaic Covenant."[2]

The Importance of the Covenants

As indicated in section one, the biblical covenants are central to our understanding of the unfolding of Yahweh's plan of redemption in human history. Understanding the biblical covenants, then, is not a mere intellectual exercise but is a solid foundational anchor for believers to know what God is doing and how He is doing it. A brief summary of what each covenant demonstrates about Yahweh's working may suffice for now.

The Noahic Covenant provides for the stability of nature in order for the other covenants to be enacted and realized in the post-flood world. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God chose a special people through whom the Seed of the woman would come as announced by the Lord in **Genesis 3:15**. The Priestly Covenant is a divine promise for the perpetual priesthood of the line of Phinehas all the way through the millennial temple. In the Mosaic Covenant, God revealed in the daily sacrifices a reminder of the need for the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sin and the turning away of His wrath. In the Davidic Covenant, Yahweh promised the perpetual reign of one of David's descendants, which will be ultimately fulfilled in Messiah Jesus in His millennial reign. In the New Covenant, Yahweh works in individuals, putting His law in their hearts at regeneration, thereby granting them eternal life.

The church (comprised of Jews and Gentiles) is benefiting from this gracious work of God. The Jews, as a national entity, will do so at the return of Messiah to establish His Kingdom.

[2] *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, MacArthur and Mayhue, General Editors

The Covenants and Eschatology

Futuristic Premillennialism is a theological school of thought based on Scripture revelation that maintains that God has a future plan for ethnic Israel. The Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants will find their confluence in the Millennial Kingdom ruled by Messiah. When God began His covenant program with the nation of Israel, He made the covenants listed in the previous paragraph irrevocable.

Premillennialism and Covenant Theology

These two schools of theology, though, differ as to the derivation of covenants. Reformation or Covenant theologians assert that biblical covenants should be theologically derived, whereas premillennial theologians assert and maintain that covenants are to be understood as deriving from biblically explicit statements.

Covenant theologians affirm three covenants: the Covenant of Grace, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Redemption. While there may be truth contained in these ideas, they are not supported by explicit scriptural statements.

"Theology derived covenants imposed on biblical covenants can alter God's intended revelation. Covenant theology, for example, has often used the extra biblical covenant of grace idea to deny the biblical distinction between Israel and the church."[3]

[3] *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, MacArthur and Mayhue, General Editors