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Fortuneteller, gazing into crystal ball, to frog: You are going to meet a beautiful young woman. From the moment she sets eyes on you she will have an insatiable desire to know all about you. She will be compelled to get close to you—you'll fascinate her."

Frog: "Where am I? At a singles club?"

Fortuneteller: "Biology class."

[Source unknown](#)

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Lesson 2 Of Sherlock and Stars The Covenants

Focus Verses: Gen 12:1-4 / Deut 30:1-10

Memory Verse

Hebrews 11:12-13 (NLT)

¹² *And so a whole nation came from this one man, Abraham, who was too old to have any children—a nation with so many people that, like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.* ¹³ *All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth.*

What is a covenant?

If covenants are mostly from the Old Testament, why are they important to us?

Eschatology and the place of the Church in the “end times” actually commence in an understanding of the covenants involving God and Israel.

A Covenant is an agreement between two parties. Sometimes the agreement required actions be performed by both parties, such as, “if you do this, I’ll do that.” Sometimes the agreement or covenant was a unilateral covenant. Party number one promised to do something and nothing was required of the other party. The covenants we are going to study are all unilateral covenants. God made promises that He would do something, and there was nothing required by the humans involved.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine they lay down for the night, and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend. “Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see.”

Watson replied, “I see millions and millions of stars.”

Holmes asked, "What does that tell you?"

Watson pondered for a minute. "Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, I can see that God is omnipotent and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow.

... "What does it tell you?"

Holmes was silent for a minute, then spoke.

"Watson, you meathead. Someone has stolen our tent."

As we move into today's lesson, I want to make clear the importance of keeping your "theology" and interpretative scheme separate from "statement of fact." That the grass is brown is a statement of fact. The interpretative scheme you apply to this fact might lead you to conclude that it has not rained for a considerable length of time. The "theology" behind this interpretation might be that God has withheld the rain in punishment.

There are two general interpretative schemes: covenant theology and dispensationalism.

Covenant theology is a system of interpreting the Scriptures on the basis of two or three covenants: either the covenant of works and the covenant of grace or the covenants of works, redemption, and grace. Covenant theology is primarily the theology of the Reformed (Presbyterian) Church.

Covenant theology teaches that God initially made a covenant of works with Adam, promising eternal life for obedience and death for disobedience. Adam failed, and death entered the human race. God, however, moved to resolve man's dilemma by entering into a covenant of grace through which the problem of sin and death would be overcome. Christ is the ultimate mediator of God's covenant of grace. The "covenants" of covenant theology are theological interpretations and are not found actually stated in Scripture.

Dispensationalists see a progressive order to God's revelation and dealing with mankind. The dispensations each commence with a revelation and method of God's dealing with men, followed by man's disobedience, God's punishment of the disobedience, then a new revelation. Dispensationalists disagree over the actual number of dispensations, but all generally agree to at least the following:

- Innocence – Gen 1:28
- Conscience – Gen 3:7
- Human Government – Gen 9:1

- Promise – Gen 12
- Law – Exodus 20
- Grace – Acts 2
- Millennium – Rev 21

In fairness to the covenant theologians, the timeframes of the Bible as outlined above are not spelled out as dispensations. However, the concept comes from Paul's use of a term translated as "dispensation" in the KJV/NKJV (Eph 1:10; 3:2).

A major difference in the two approaches involves a "literal" versus a "spiritual" or "symbolic" application or interpretation of the covenants. The real issue is the New Testament's use of the Old Testament. Covenant Theology places more emphasis on the New Testament, allowing it to reinterpret the Old Testament. The conclusion is that if an Old Testament promise is applied in a spiritual fashion to the church, the promise as given originally was just a picture of a future spiritual reality. We enjoy this reality now, but it had no meaning as originally given.

In a sense, Dispensationalists place more emphasis on the Old Testament. The literal force of the Old Testament cannot be changed because if you do that, you create instability in the meaning of the Old Testament. This could make God appear deceptive. So, the Old Testament promises are viewed literally as applying to Israel, even if there is a spiritual meaning to the church (us) today. After all, He promised land, a temple, etc., to the nation of Israel. We should expect real dirt, a temple made of stone and gold, etc.

Please keep in mind as we study the covenants, that the covenants of Covenant Theology are not biblical covenants but theological covenants. What we will study today are biblical covenants.

We will return to this difference as we look at the covenants, and later in Lesson 6 on the relationship of the Church to the Tribulation. For now, please understand that these materials use a dispensational approach to interpretation and understanding.

How important are the biblical covenants? Why? Or Why Not?

How important is it that Israel lives in the land at peace? Why?

What is the status of Israel's kingdom today?

What will be the state of Israel in the future? How do you know this?

There are four prime covenants according to Dispensational Theology that are to be interpreted literally, unconditionally, and eternally. There are no conditions attached to the covenants and as such they unequivocally promise Israel a future land, a Messianic rule, and spiritual blessings.

The Biblical covenants are all based in God's promise of a Redeemer (Gen 3:15 - the first biblical prophecy of Christ).

From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

These covenants we will be considering are to a covenant people, Israel (Rom 9:4; Eph 2:11, 12), and are based upon God's immutable promise (Heb 6:13-18).

The Abrahamic Covenant. Described in Genesis 12:1–3, promised:

- a land (v.1; cf. 13:14–17; further developed in the Palestinian covenant);
- numerous descendants involving a nation, dynasty, and a throne (“seed”) (v. 2; cf. 13:16; 17:2–6; further developed in the Davidic covenant);
- redemption (blessing) (v. 3; cf. 22:18; further developed in the New Covenant). A review of the covenant shows this blessing is personal, national, and universal in its promise.

This covenant is reaffirmed

- to Abraham in (Gen 15:1-21, 17:4-21, 22:15-18)
- to Isaac in (Gen 26:3-5,24)
- to Jacob in (Gen 28:13-15; 35:9-12)
- See also 1 Chron 16:17; Psalm 105:10

The covenant to Abraham is the basis of the expectation of the Old Testament writers as shown in the messages of the prophets (Isa 11:1-11; Jer 16:14-16; Ezek 11:17-21; Hos 1:10-11; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Mic 4:4-7; Zeph 3:14-20; Zech 8:4-8).

The Palestinian Covenant (Deut. 30:1–10; Ezek 16:60). This covenant guarantees Israel's permanent right to the land. It is unconditional (“God will”). This covenant encompasses the full history of Israel:

- Nation is unfaithful and chastised (Deut 28:63-68; 30:1-3)
- Future repentance ((Deut 28:63-68; 30:1-3)
- Messiah comes (Deut 30:3-6)
- Israel restored to the land (Deut 30:5)

- Israel converted as a nation (Deut 30:4-8; Hos 2:14-23; Ezek 11:11-21; Rom 11:26-27)
- Israel's enemies are judged (Deut 30:7)
- The nation receives the full blessings of God (Deut 30:9)

Many do not view this as an actual covenant since the word "covenant" is not used in the Scripture in relation to this promise. The form of this grant is similar to unilateral "treaties" of the time from the King to the people.

The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:12–16; Isa 55:3; Ezek 37:25). The provisions of this covenant are summarized in v16 by the words

- "house," promising a dynasty in the lineage of David; -- the seed and, perhaps, the land of the Abrahamic Covenant
- "kingdom," referring to a people who are governed by a king; "throne," emphasizing the authority of the king's rule; -- the seed of the Abrahamic
- "forever," emphasizing the eternal and unconditional nature of this promise to Israel. – the blessing of the Abrahamic

This covenant highlights the mix of the promises to Israel as encompassing both a temporal, local promise and an eternal, universal promise.

The "kingdom" offered to Israel is always an earthly kingdom:

As offered by John the Baptist (Matt 3:2)

By Jesus (Matt 4:17)

By the Twelve (Matt 10:5-7)

By the seventy (Luke 10:1-12)

In the parables of (Matt 13; 25:1-13, 31-46)

It is always viewed as in the future, so it has not been fulfilled (Hos 2:18-20; Isa 55:3)

The kingdom is "on hold" during this present age (Matt 24; Luke 21; Acts 1:8; 3:21)

It will be reoffered to the Nation of Israel prior to the Second Advent (Rev 11:15-17; 14:6-7; Matt 24:14)

The New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34). This covenant provides the basis by which God will bless Israel in the future. The nation enjoys forgiveness of sins through the Cross. The unconditional nature of this covenant is once more seen in the "I will" statements of vv. 33–34. This is an amplification of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.

This covenant is with Israel (Isa 59:20-21; 61:8-8; Jer 31:31; 50:4-5; Ezek 16:60-63).

Is there any conclusion you can draw about the relationship of these covenants and the book of Revelation?

Israel

If these four covenants are understood according to their normal meaning, then they call for a future blessing of believing, national Israel in the land under Messiah's rule. These covenants await a fulfillment in the Millennium.

Note that the Mosaic Covenant, the law is missing from this list. The law was conditional upon obedience. Paul tells us in Galatians 3 that the purpose of the law was that of a schoolmaster or guardian to "lead" us to Christ.

What does this absence tell you about the importance and place of the Law for the church?
