

# Covenant Theology and the New Covenant

## Introduction

The first eleven chapters of Genesis reveal how God dealt with the whole human race. In chapter twelve, however, God began a revolutionary, new, divine program. No longer would He deal with all of humanity directly. Instead, He created a new race of people who would act as His intermediaries. God tapped Abraham and began a new race of people—the Jews. Through them, and them alone, would God reveal Himself to mankind. Thus, the world became divided into two races: Jew and Gentile.

Before God called Abraham, He established the Noahic covenant with the human race.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with and after Abraham, God established several new covenants. All of them would be with the new race, the Jews. In addition, God revealed Himself through Jewish prophets, and Jews became the recipients and custodians of the written Word of God (Romans 3.1-2). These divine actions meant the Jews became the repository of God's revelation to man and the mediators of divine blessing. Thus, the *only* path of God's blessing to Gentiles lay through Jews.

God's decision would result in a massive theological problem. According to the plan God had revealed in the covenants and through His prophets, Gentiles would be blessed through Israel. The zenith of blessing would be the Messianic kingdom (Zechariah 14.9). But the promised blessings and the kingdom required Israel to accept her Messiah, for the Messiah would implement all the blessings. But the Jews rejected their Messiah (Acts 2.22-23, 3.13-14). This rejection precipitated a theological crisis. How could Jews be blessed in light of their rejection of the Messiah, and furthermore, how could Gentiles be blessed since their blessing depended on Israel? The answer to these questions from God's revelation in the Old

Testament was clear: they couldn't. No program or mechanism existed to bless Jew or Gentile in light of Jewish rejection of the Messiah.

Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13), however, taught that Gentiles, especially the Church, the body of Christ (in which there is no Jew or Gentile, Galatians 3.28), had received God's blessings *apart from Israel*. Paul taught this truth throughout his letters and illustrated it with his example of the olive tree in Romans 11. How could Paul write this in light of God's revelation for 2,000 years that Gentiles could not be blessed apart from Israel?

The theological system commonly known as Covenant Theology fails to address this problem. It largely employs a "replacement theology" in which the Church replaces Israel. Such a system essentially dismisses God's promises to national Israel. Most in the Dispensational school also fail to recognize this problem and provide a credible explanation.<sup>2</sup> This article will examine how God could bless Gentiles apart from Israel, remain true to His word, and yet keep His promises to national Israel.

The Mosaic Covenant: Conditional?

Whatever differences theologians have, most view the Mosaic Covenant as "conditional." Was it? The answer to that question depends on how "conditional" is defined. Moses recorded the following after God delivered the Jews from the slavery of Egypt:

<sup>4</sup> *'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. <sup>5</sup> Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. <sup>7</sup> So Moses came*

*and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. <sup>8</sup>All the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. (Exodus 19.4-8).*

From this text, one can reasonably conclude that the Mosaic covenant was conditional. It contains the expected "if . . . then" element of a conditional statement as well as an assent by the people: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." But the essential conditional sense of the covenant is in the realm of time. In other words, the fulfillment of the covenant was not a matter of "if" but "when."

God's words to Israel were sovereign. Israel was required to obey and keep the covenant if the nation was to be blessed. While national Israel largely failed due to unbelief, especially in the matter of recognizing and accepting the Messiah, the Old Testament prophets and the Lord Jesus Christ declared they *will* succeed. They will become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Isaiah 60.1-5; Zechariah 8.20-23 cf. Romans 11.26-29). This outcome is certain. If it fails, God will be revealed as a liar and Satan will have defeated God. We should not be flummoxed that Israel has failed so far. God is eternal and extremely patient. His ways are not our ways and He is always on time. Fulfillment is not a question of *if* but *when*. And "when" is the card God holds closest to His chest.

In His earthly ministry, Jesus revealed *how* and *when* Israel would receive these blessings. He told the Jews they would not see Him until they said, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23.37-39). They *will* utter these words. They *will* repent. They *will* recognize Him as their Messiah-King. John the Baptist and Jesus preached a message of repentance (Matthew 3.1-2; 4.17). The Jews of Jesus' generation failed: they refused to repent. But a future

generation of Jews, a generation that will endure and survive the Tribulation, will succeed (John 10.16). Success will be defined as national repentance (Zechariah 12.1-14; Romans 11.26 cf. Acts 2.37-39, 3.17-21). Paul, in his great dissertation on Israel in Romans 9-11 wrote, “all Israel” would be saved. “All Israel” was exactly this: all Israel. It constitutes every Jew living at that the end of the Tribulation. These Jews will go into the Messianic kingdom and will compose the Jews who will form the nation of Israel in the Millennium. When the Jews repent, the Lord will be able to keep His promise and return to establish His kingdom. God *will* fulfill all His promises to the nation. The covenants *will* go into full effect. Israel *will* become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19.6). The Jews *will* become a channel of blessing to Gentiles. This is future history. But when God states He will do something we can rest upon it. It *will* happen.

#### Usage of the Term

The first usage of the word “covenant” occurs in Genesis 6.18 (cf. Genesis 9.9-17) with God’s warning Noah of the coming Flood. The Hebrew word for “covenant” is [ברית](#) and occurs 285 times in the Old Testament. The word for “covenant” in the New Testament is [διαθήκη](#) and occurs 33 times.

As noted above, God established all of His covenants, with the exception of the Noahic covenant, with the Jews. Biblically, “covenant theology,” is “Jewish theology” or what might better be termed “Israelology.” Christianity has *no covenants*. Thus, “covenant theology” with respect to Christianity is meaningless. The chart below illustrates that the covenants God established in the Old Testament applied almost exclusively to Jews.

| <b>Divine Covenants</b> | <b>Recipient</b> | <b>First Declared</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Noahic                  | All mankind      | Genesis 6.18, 9.9-17  |

|                    |                             |                                     |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Abrahamic          | Abraham (Jewish progenitor) | Genesis 12.1-3, 15.7-21             |
| Mosaic             | Jews                        | Exodus 20.1-17                      |
| Sabbatic           | Jews                        | Exodus 31.12-18                     |
| Palestinian (Land) | Jews                        | Deuteronomy 30.1-10                 |
| Davidic            | Jews (Davidic lineage)      | 2 Samuel 7.12-13                    |
| New                | Jews                        | Jeremiah 31.31-34; Ezekiel 36.24-28 |

### Use of the Word "Covenant" in the New Testament

The chart below lists the books and verses of the New Testament where the word "covenant," διαθήκη occurs.

| Use of Covenant (διαθήκη) in the New Testament (33x in 30 verses) |   |
|---|---|
| Book(s)   | Passages  |
| Gospels (4x in 4 verses)  | Matthew 26.28; Mark 14.24; Luke 1.72, 22.20;  |
| Acts (2x in 2 verses)   | Acts 3.25, 7.8  |
| Paul's Epistles (9x in 9 verses)                                  | Romans 9.4, 11.27; 1 Corinthians 11.25; 2 Corinthians 3.6, 14; Galatians 3.15, 17, 4.24; Ephesians 2.12 |
| Hebrews (17x in 14 verses)  | Hebrews 7.22, 8.6, 8, 9, 10, 9.4, 15, 16, 17, 20, 10.16, 29, 12.24, 13.20;                              |
| Revelation (1x)   | Revelation 11.19  |

### Gospels

While the Gospels are in the "New Testament" they are Old Testament works. The "New Testament" as popularly understood is a problematic construct. Jesus' earthly ministry was exclusive to Jews and Israel operated under the Mosaic Law, i.e., Old Covenant or Old Testament. Throughout His ministry, Jesus appealed to the Law (Old Testament). He gave no indication it was not in effect or would cease (Matthew 5.18; Luke 16.17) and His ministry was to fulfill the Old Testament promises (Romans 15.8).

### Acts

The first usage of the term “covenant” in Acts is in Peter’s second sermon to the Jewish nation. In this sermon, Peter continued the message of repentance John the Baptist and Jesus preached (Matthew 3.1-2, 4.17; Mark 1.14-15). Peter appealed to the Jews to repent and accept Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 3.11-26). He reminded them they were the “sons of the prophets” and heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant. The second use of the term is found in Stephen’s defense before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7). He too reminded his judges that they were the descendants of Abraham and heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant.

## Hebrews

Of the 33 usages of [διαθήκη](#) in the New Testament, more than half (17) occur in the book of Hebrews. This should not be surprising since the covenants belonged to the Jews. The watchword of the book of Hebrews is “better.” Hebrews teaches the New Covenant is better than the Old (Mosaic) Covenant. Of the 17 verses in which [διαθήκη](#) occurs, 5 are direct quotes from the Old Testament prophets about God’s promise to establish a New Covenant with national Israel. Jesus initiated the establishment of the New Covenant at the last supper (Matthew 26.28; Mark 14.24; Luke 22.20). The Twelve disciples were representatives of the nation since the Lord had promised they would rule over the nation (Matthew 19.28). But while the Lord inaugurated the New Covenant, it has not yet taken full effect. For that to occur Israel must repent.

## Revelation

In Revelation, the heavenly Ark of the Covenant is present (Revelation 11.19). God commanded Moses to construct an earthly tabernacle as a representation of heavenly reality (Exodus 25.8-9, 40; Acts 7.44; Hebrews 8.5 cf. Exodus 25.40). The tabernacle was an earthly model of God’s throne complex. While earthly things are indeed real, compared to heavenly things they are but shadows. This is why we find an Ark in heaven. Plato was right. His theory of Forms or Ideas provided

insight into this truth and his illustration of the cave demonstrated how earthly realities were but shadows of heavenly (true) realities. C. S. Lewis portrayed this in his novels *The Great Divorce* and *The Last Battle*.

These passages confirm the record of the Old Testament. The covenants belonged to Israel alone—Gentiles had no part of them (Romans 3.1-2; Ephesians 2.11-12).

### The Church and the New Covenant

God's promise of the New Covenant was made to Israel (Jeremiah 31.31-34; Ezekiel 36.24-28) just as all the other covenantal promises had been. The New Covenant, however, was different from the other covenants. The others promised earthly, physical blessings to Israel. The blessings of the New Covenant are primarily spiritual, rather than physical.

As noted above, God laid a new administrative foundation with the Abrahamic Covenant. Gentiles would be blessed through Israel. Thus, we read,

*<sup>1</sup> Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; <sup>2</sup> And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; <sup>3</sup> And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12.1-3).*

The Abrahamic Covenant was the foundation of all future covenants God would make with Israel. The source of all covenantal blessings—to Jew and Gentile—was the Messiah. The great message of hope of the Jewish prophets throughout the Old Testament was the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom (Zechariah 14.9). Numerous prophetic verses revealed God's plan for blessing Gentiles through Israel and the Messiah

(Isaiah 2.4, 11.10, 42.1-7, 49.5-7, 60.1-3 cf. Luke 2.25-32; Isaiah 61.4-7, 62.1-5; Jeremiah 3.15-18; Zechariah 8.20-23).

Conspicuously absent from the Old Testament is the Church. God provided no evidence He would create the Church, the body of Christ, in which Jew and Gentile would be equal in Christ. Jesus, in His earthly ministry, revealed nothing of the Church. The Twelve (even at Pentecost) knew nothing of it. Everything at Pentecost was Jewish and Peter addressed Jews only. How do we learn about the Church? The risen, glorified Christ revealed this great truth to Paul. Paul alone received this revelation and taught that it was a secret ([μυστήριον](#)) until God had revealed it to him (1 Corinthians 3.10-11; 1 Timothy 1.15-16 (πρῶτος="first");<sup>3</sup> Ephesian 3.1-9).

Since the Church was kept secret, the fact it would participate in the New Covenant could not have been known. As Paul disclosed the secret of the Church, he also revealed it participates in the spiritual benefits of the New Covenant. As noted above, the provisions of the New Covenant differed substantially from those of Israel's other covenants. The other covenants involved physical blessings, e.g., land, nation, kingdom, etc. But the promises of the New Covenant are spiritual, i.e., forgiveness of sins and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Members of the body of Christ experience forgiveness of sins, the indwelling Holy Spirit, knowledge of the Lord, and a new heart (2 Corinthians 5.17).

The chart below illustrates how God communicated His plan of Law to Moses and His plan of Grace to Paul. God revealed the Law to Moses who communicated it to Israel. God revealed His plan of Grace through Paul who taught it to the Church. This "grace" plan was composed of "secrets" God had revealed to no one before Paul.<sup>4</sup>

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>God's Plan for Israel</b> | <b>God's Plan for Gentiles/Body of Christ</b> |
|------------------------------|---|



|                         |                                       |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| God ↓ (dispensed)       | God ↓ (dispensed)                     |
| Law (to)                | Grace (to)                            |
| Moses ↓ (for)           | Paul ↓ (for)                          |
| Israel/Believing Israel | Gentiles/Church, i.e., Body of Christ |

## Paul and Covenant

God commissioned Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13). Since this was his ministry (Galatians 2.7-9) how did Paul deal with the subject of covenant with regard to Gentiles and especially with the Church, the body of Christ. Paul used the term "covenant" 9 times in his letters. Do Paul's writings align with those of other writers? The answer is "yes" but with a twist.

Romans 9.4 In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote the following concerning the Jewish people:

*who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises (Romans 9.4),*

Less anyone doubt Paul meant racial Jews, we have only to look at the previous verse:

*For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, (Romans 9.3).*

## Ephesians 2.11-12

Writing the Ephesians, Paul explicitly declared that Gentiles were excluded from Israel's covenants:

<sup>11</sup> *Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human*

*hands—<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Could words be more clear? Paul confirmed the Old Testament record that God made covenants with Israel. Gentiles were “excluded ([ἀπαλλοτριόω](#)) from the commonwealth of Israel” and “strangers ([ξένος](#)) to the covenants” But Paul also taught the Church, the body of Christ, participates in and enjoys the blessings of one covenant: the New Covenant. Is this a contradiction?

Romans 11.27

Paul revealed God’s plan for the future of national Israel in light of their rejection of their Messiah in Romans 9-11 Paul confirmed everything that the prophets had written. God was not finished with national Israel. He vigorously argued God had not replaced Israel with the Church. In Romans 11.25-27 he wrote:

*<sup>25</sup> For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; <sup>26</sup> and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written “The Deliverer will come from Zion, (Isaiah 59.20) He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.” <sup>27</sup> “This is My covenant with them, (Isaiah 59.21; Jeremiah 31.31, 34) When I take away their sins.” (Isaiah 27.9)*

Paul argued God would fulfill His promise to Israel He declared in Exodus 19.4-6.<sup>5</sup>

1 Corinthians 11.25

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with the Twelve (Matthew 26.26-29; Mark 14.22-25; Luke 22.14-23). The apostle Paul received his information about its significance, not from the Twelve, but directly from the risen Lord. Paul wrote:

*<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11.23-26).*

This passage was Paul's first mention of covenant in relation to the Church, the body of Christ. From it, we learn that while covenants pertained to Israel, members of the Church, the body of Christ, are to keep the Lord's supper. Why is this, if, as we have seen, all the covenants God made beginning with Abraham were with the Jews? The significance of the Lord's supper is it represents the Lord's death for our sins. His death paid the price for our sins so that God could forgive us. His death for our sins is a spiritual benefit and forms the basis for the New Covenant. And as we have seen, the New Covenant's blessings are primarily spiritual rather than physical.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, Paul went on to discuss the New Covenant. He declared,

*who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3.6).*

Paul stated the Jews' hearts were hardened (Romans 11.25, [πώρωσις](#), cf. Romans 11.7) but that the veil, "blindness," "hardening" is removed when one turns to the Lord.

*But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ (2 Corinthians 3.14).*

One of the wonderful truths Paul revealed was that anyone who believes his gospel, that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4), whether Jew or Gentile, is saved and is not subject to the Mosaic Law. The believer in Christ is freed from the bondage of the Law. This was one of Paul's great themes which he taught throughout his letters (Romans 6.14; Galatians 4.28-5.1). Paul wrote the entire book of Galatians to make this point. Sadly, most in Christendom still teach that the believer in Christ is under Law in some form or fashion.

### Galatians 3.15-18

<sup>15</sup> *Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.* <sup>16</sup> *Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.* <sup>17</sup> *What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.* <sup>18</sup> *For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.*

Paul wrote the Galatians to correct the false teaching that they were to live under the administration of the Mosaic Law. Some Jews (most of whom were believers in Jesus the

Messiah) were teaching Paul's converts they were subject to the Mosaic Law. Such teaching was undermining Paul's teachings of grace (Galatians 1.6-9; cf. Acts 15.1, 5, 10-11). To counter this error, Paul used the Old Testament (which the Jews of Judea would understand) itself to prove his doctrine. He argued the Abrahamic covenant took precedence over the Mosaic covenant (Galatians 3.17-18). The covenant God gave Moses at Mt. Sinai did not supplant the covenant He had established with Abraham. Why did Paul make this point? The doctrines Paul received from the risen Lord were doctrines of grace, not Law. Paul used Abraham as his example of one who was justified by faith alone, faith + 0 (Romans 4.1-4) and Abraham came before Moses.

#### Galatians 4.21-26

<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. <sup>24</sup> This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

Paul used covenantal language to illustrate the argument made in Galatians that believers of his gospel are not under Law but under Grace. From God's perspective the Law was perfect (Romans 7.12). But man's fallen nature is unable to keep it (Romans 7.14). Because of this, the Law was bondage. Grace, however, is freedom. We "keep the Law," that is, the morality of the Law, through the operation of the Holy Spirit but we

are not under the Law as an *administrative system*. Rather, we are under the administration of grace (Romans 6.14) not under the administration of Law. Grace operates via love and the indwelling and controlling Holy Spirit. This is an entirely new relationship and system of administration.

### The Question Answered

Paul wrote relatively little about the New Covenant. But he taught the Church, the body of Christ, participates in it. The spiritual benefits of the New Covenant are forgiveness of sins and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. These became available because of Christ's work, i.e., His death and resurrection. Paul wrote that believers possess these blessings. How could Gentiles (who compose the vast majority of the body of Christ) receive covenantal blessings since all blessings were to come through Israel and Israel had rejected the Messiah?

Part of the answer to this question is that God keeps secrets (Deuteronomy 29.29). One of these secrets God had kept was that of the Church, the body of Christ. At the proper time, He revealed this secret to Paul who became His "agent" as "apostle of the Gentiles" (Romans 11.13). In 1 Corinthians 15.8, Paul wrote, "and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." What did he mean by "untimely born?" Paul's salvation occurred when he recognized and believed Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 9.5, 20, 22). His salvation prefigured, hence "untimely born," the future salvation of the Jewish nation. The word "untimely born" is ἔκτρωμα, (ἐκ + τραῦμα or τρῶμα), i.e., out of a wound and means an "abortion," "miscarriage," "untimely birth." According to Old Testament prophecy, Israel will be reborn in a day (Isaiah 66.8). Paul had this prophecy in mind when he wrote Romans 11.26 and declared "all Israel" would be saved. Jesus had promised the nation He would return when they said, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23.39).

Paul's spiritual birth pictured the Jewish nation's salvation. Because of this, he could be God's representative to provide blessings to Gentiles and especially the Church, the body of Christ. As noted above, the Church was a "secret" which God revealed to Paul. Paul stated he laid its foundation (1 Corinthians 3.10) and was the "first" (πρῶτος), i.e., first in succession and the pattern or prototype of the Church (1 Timothy 1.15-16). God, through Paul, as a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Philippians 3.5), could keep His promise of the Abrahamic Covenant intact and bless Gentiles, even though Israel had rejected her Messiah. God knew all of this from eternity past but kept it secret (Colossians 1.25-27; Ephesians 3.1-9). Thus, while Israel has temporarily rejected their Messiah, Gentile blessings, specifically, God's blessings to the Church, have been mediated, not from national Israel, but from Paul (1 Corinthians 15.8; Romans 11.13; 1 Corinthians 4.16; 11.1; Philippians 3.17). God used Paul to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant until national Israel repents.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Covenants are agreements or contracts between two parties. Each party has a part in the agreement. When we examine the covenant God made with Noah and later, the covenants He made with the Jews, we do not find this pattern. God's covenants were unilateral. Noah had no part of the Noahic Covenant. Abraham had no part of the Abrahamic covenant. David had no part of the Davidic covenant. The Jews had no part of the Palestinian (Land), Sabbatic, or New covenants. As for the Mosaic covenant, the people did have a part in it since they had agreed, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19.8). How much choice did they really have? Hebrews says God imposed (ἐπίκειμαι) the Law upon them (Hebrews 9.9-10). The Jews failed to keep the Law but one day they will keep it. Given all this what are we to conclude? God's covenants are really *promises*. They are declarations of God's sovereignty about what *He* will do.

<sup>2</sup> Covenant theologians see the plan of God through the lens of

covenant. Their theological system is a construct consisting of a covenant of works and a covenant of grace, which operate under a covenant of redemption. While works, grace, and redemption are Biblical truths, the Bible does not teach them as covenants. One cannot find a "covenant of works," a "covenant of redemption," or a "covenant of grace" in the Bible. Biblical covenants are the Noahic, Abrahamic, Palestinian, Mosaic, Sabbatic, Davidic, and New. The operational structure of the theological system known as "covenant theology" is not a Biblical system. Because of this, it creates theological confusion. For it to work, texts are interpreted inconsistently. Some texts are viewed as literal, i.e., soteriology, Christology, pneumatology, etc., while others, i.e., eschatological and ecclesiological, are viewed allegorically or typically. National Israel (the recipient of Biblical covenants) disappears and is replaced by the Church. The result is a patchwork theological system. The worst of it is if covenant theology is right, God cannot be trusted to keep His word. One can have "covenant theology" or a sovereign God. One cannot have both. Dispensationalism views God's dealings with mankind through dispensations rather than covenants. Structurally and interpretively, this system has a Biblical basis and texts are generally viewed consistently. "Dispensation" (οἰκονομία) is a Biblical word and means stewardship or administration. Paul used it in writing to the Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians (1 Corinthians 9.17; Ephesians 1.10, 3.2; Colossians 1.25) about God's dealings with man. The problem for Dispensationalists is they also abandon Biblical concepts and a consistent hermeneutic in key areas. The result is what one would expect: bad theology. For example, in the context of our above subject, some dispensationalists argue the Church does not participate in the New Covenant or that there are two New Covenants—one for Israel and one for the Church. Some Dispensationalists teach the Church began to at Pentecost. These errors result from unsound exegesis.



<sup>3</sup> See the author's study: [Paul: Chief of Sinners?](#)

<sup>4</sup> See the author's study: [Paul's Mystery](#).

<sup>5</sup> While some argue the Church is Israel, I have yet to find anyone who argues it is Jacob (Romans 11.26)!

<sup>6</sup> Once national Israel repents and accepts Jesus as the Messiah, they will again assume their position as the agent of Gentile blessing. They will fulfill this role in the Messianic Kingdom and fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies.

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