
a *Grace Notes* course

Foundations I

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Foundations 107

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Grace Notes

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Lesson 18 – Interpret Covenantally

This principle recognizes the agreements (or contracts) made between God and men. There are conditional covenants that depend upon man's compliance, and there are unconditional covenants that depend solely upon the truthfulness of God's Word.

Covenants are important because they give us a basic overview of history regarding how God relates to His people. If we understand God's covenants and allow those promises to guide us, we will be kept from incorrectly interpreting passages that seem to conflict. For example, the Israelites may be disciplined during human history with periods of difficulty and disaster (Lev 26), but will not be eliminated, as God has promised to protect them.

There are nine covenants that require individual study. We will simply note their titles and present a brief description of each covenant with its location in Scripture.

1 THE EDENIC COVENANT.

The Edenic Covenant was made in the Garden of Eden between Adam and God (Gen 1-2). It was conditional based on the man's obedience, and involved God's promise to bless man with a perfect environment (2:8), perfect food, visual stimulation (2:9), perfect weather (1:6-7, 3:8), perfect sex (2:21-25), and daily fellowship with the Lord (1:26-27, 3:8). The covenant was initially accepted by man, but broken when he violated God's order not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree.

The Edenic Covenant is no longer in effect, but many of the blessings will be restored to man during the future period of the New Heavens and Earth (Rev 21-22). Therefore, we must not interpret this Covenant into contexts which do not specifically deal with the Garden of Eden. Mankind will not establish all the blessings promised apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 THE ADAMIC COVENANT.

The Adamic Covenant was made between God and Adam in the Garden after the Fall, before the expulsion (Genesis 3:14-19). It was unconditional.

This covenant was the consequences of the original sin, known as the "Fall". God cursed the instrument of deception (3:14), and brought a conflict into history between the descendants of Adam and the serpent (3:14-15). The woman was given pain in childbearing and a subordinate standing to the male (3:16). The earth was cursed (3:17-19), causing difficulty in the production of food. The man and the woman were scheduled to die physically (3:19 cf. 2:17), and both were expelled from the perfect habitat of the Garden (3:17-19).

The Adamic Covenant spans all dispensations and will be in effect for all humanity until God throws the Devil into the Lake of Fire after the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom (Rev 20:7-10). We must realize that the effects of Adam's fall pass on to all of mankind (Rom 5:12-14).

3 THE NOAHIC COVENANT.

The Noahic Covenant, which is found in Genesis 8:20-9:17, was made between God and Noah after the Great Flood. It was made as an unconditional covenant addressing the destruction of pre-flood civilization. It included a promise that there would never again be a universal flood that would destroy civilization. It also included God's command to repopulate the earth (9:1), the provision of animal flesh for food (9:2-4), and the installment of capital punishment as penalty for murder (9:5,6). The rainbow was given as the sign of God's faithfulness in regard to this covenant.

The Noahic Covenant began at the Flood and lasts forever. While there may be local floods that destroy property and cause loss of life, there will be none that brings the universal destruction that the Great Flood brought. The freedom to eat animal flesh was also given and thus we should not interpret passages that refer to a diet solely of vegetables (Dan 1) to be the standard for all mankind. The final part of this Covenant established God's penalty for murder which is still His will today.

4 THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.

The basic promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are found in Genesis 12:1-3, with further additions and explanations given later. It was made with Abraham, and was conditional to him until he met

the Lord's requirements, then the covenant was extended unconditionally to his descendants.

The covenant with Abraham includes the promises of personal blessing, innumerable descendants, real estate, a city, national status, blessing by association, protection and the line of descent of the Messiah (Gen 17:1-8).

The Abrahamic Covenant began with the promise to Abraham. The line of the Messiah was fulfilled at the First Advent by Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16). The promise of material blessings associated with the Covenant have been given at various points in history but will reach their potential in the Millennial Kingdom. This covenant spans all Dispensations from the promise to Abraham through the Millennium.

The meaning of a particularly confusing passage in God's Word is more readily understood when one applies the principles of the Abrahamic Covenant to it. The passage is found in Matthew 11:20-24 and says,

"Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. "Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. "Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

By grace, Israel is given some extra time to repent because of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. If Israel does not repent, the discipline will be severe, but the nation will not be destroyed and removed from history.

5 THE MOSAIC COVENANT.

The Mosaic Covenant of Law was made with Moses on Mount Sinai. It can be found in Exodus 20 and several other passages in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This covenant is conditional, based on obedience. Those who

obeyed were blessed and those who did not were cursed (Lev 26).

The primary purpose of the Mosaic Covenant was to show the need for the Savior (Gal 3:24-25). It clearly presented God's moral law. The covenant was also given to Israel to establish and set guidelines for the Levitical Priesthood and the Tabernacle.

Jesus Christ came to fulfill this covenant by perfectly keeping the Law (Matt 5:17). This Covenant is only for the Age of Israel which includes the time from the initial giving of the Mosaic Law (Exod 20) until the Day of Pentecost which began the Church. It will also include the time known as the "Tribulation" which is seven years of human history that will occur after the Rapture of the Church.

We must realize that many passages found in the Old Testament refer only to time spent under the Mosaic Law. For example, many animals are declared "unclean" and are not to be eaten (Lev 11). This does not apply to us today as Jesus Christ made it clear that all foods are now "clean" (Mark 7:14-18).

6 THE DAVIDIC COVENANT.

The Davidic Covenant was made with David and is found in 2 Samuel 7:8-19 and Psalm 89. It is an unconditional covenant, which established national rulership in David's house, and the promise of a "Greater Son" who would rule over the nations forever.

The Davidic Covenant became effective when it was given to David during his kingship. Part of the Covenant was fulfilled by the coming of the "Greater Son" who is Jesus Christ Himself at the First Advent (Luke 1:32). The results will extend forever.

At one time the line of David was in the hands of an eight-year-old king named Josiah (2 Kings 22:1). A Jew living during this time would still have a foundation of hope that is built on the promise of God. Jesus Himself received "all authority...in heaven and on earth," after His resurrection (Matt 28:18) in fulfillment of this Covenant. The Believer today can have comfort knowing that Jesus is on the heavenly throne (Heb

8:1) and will one day return to establish His earthly throne (Matt 25:31).

7 THE PALESTINIAN COVENANT.

The Palestinian Covenant is a continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant. This conditional covenant promises dispersion of the Jewish peoples because of disobedience, but then a regathering into the land after they repent (Deut 30:1-10).

This Covenant is for the Age of Israel and will be fulfilled when the Jews are supernaturally regathered at the Second Advent (Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27) and the land promised to Abraham, from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates, is established (Gen 15:18). From the giving of the Covenant forward, the interpreter should consider that dispersions of Israel from the land are only temporary.

8 THE NEW COVENANT TO ISRAEL.

A New Covenant was made with the House of Israel in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and was reiterated in Hebrews 8:8-12. This covenant is based on the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb 9:11-14), and is unconditional to regenerate Jews (Jews that have undergone the new birth).

The covenant, which includes the promises of the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit and great material wealth (Jer 32:41; Isa 61:8), will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom. It is important to remember while studying the Scriptures that the promises made by God in this Covenant are given to believing Jews only. Jews will not be blessed under this covenant simply because of their race.

9 THE NEW COVENANT TO THE CHURCH.

A New Covenant was also made to the New Testament Church (Matt 26:26-28). It is unconditional for Believers in Jesus Christ, based on the cross (Heb 9:11-14), and commemorated in the ritual of the Lord's Table - Communion (1 Cor 11:25). It establishes the universal and royal priesthood of Believers (Heb 9:11), and promises to be fulfilled both in time and for eternity. Jesus Christ became the Mediator of this covenant (Heb 9:15).

This Covenant began on the Day of Pentecost with the establishment of the Church (Acts 2) and will

last forever. The student should remember that the blessings received under this Covenant will last forever and cannot be taken away. Thus, the Church Age Believer has complete security that no matter what difficulties one experiences in life, the Lord has not forsaken - and will never forsake - them (Matt 28:18-20).

Lesson 19 – Interpret Specifically

This principle recognizes that there are some specific questions that must be answered when interpreting the Bible. For example, we must ask, “Who said this?” “To whom was this said?” “Under what circumstances was it said?” and “Whom does this concern?”

The principle recognizes that God has dealt with three classes of people in history, namely, the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church (1 Cor 10:32). Therefore, we must seek to determine who the recipients were of a given portion of Scripture so that we may know whether a promise, covenant, or warning applies to us.

We have seen in our brief study of covenants that to whom a covenant applies is very important. A Gentile nation (non-Jewish races) for example, may be removed or dispersed because of evil and disobedience to the Lord. The Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Persian Empires are just a few examples of nations (peoples) to whom this has happened.

God not only promised to disperse Israel but He also promised to regather them. No other nation has these promises. If we were to apply promises to other nations that were given specifically to Israel, we would be in error.

A second example would be the promise of a nation, land and citizenship in Canaan for Israel (Gen 12:1-3, 13:15), but a citizenship in heaven for the Church (Php 3:20). National status and land is not promised to the Church or to other nations.

A third example would be a contrast between the blessing for Israel based on their relationship to God (Deut 8:7-10) and a blessing on the Gentiles for their blessing on Israel (Gen 12:3). There is no

such blessing promised for those who bless the Church or Gentile nations.

Lesson 20 – Interpret Prophecy Carefully

This principle recognizes that the Bible very clearly foretells future events. The Bible also tells us very clearly that true prophecies come through men moved by the Spirit of God, and that “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” (2 Pet 1:19-21). There are many unique attempts at interpretation of prophecy, and sadly, many are totally deceptive. It is well known that cults often use special or unique interpretations of prophecy as a means to win converts. Let us remember that as Believers in Jesus Christ, we are all priests. Beware of anyone with a new and unique interpretation; beware of those who require you to believe their new and unique interpretation in order to be accepted into their group.

The interpreter of prophecy actually puts together a large picture that has been cut into many thousands of pieces (there are probably 10,000 verses of prophecy). When the picture is complete, we must see the face of Christ, who is the focal point of all history - past, present and future. The picture that emerges must account for all the known facts, and must take all pieces of evidence into consideration. It is not our privilege to discount facts that do not fit the picture we think we are going to see.

The study of the interpretation of prophecy can be a course unto itself, as over 1/4 of all Scripture is found in prophetic books. For our purposes in this lesson, however, there are three simple guidelines to be followed.

1 DETERMINE IF THE PROPHET MAKES THE INTERPRETATION.

First, determine if the prophet gives his own interpretation like Jesus did in John 2:19-21 concerning the Temple. The passage says:

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews therefore said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three

days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.”

Some prophecies such as this one are easy to interpret. Realize too that God may leap over centuries of time without making a comment. He may also leap over centuries of time even within the same verse, such as is seen in a comparison of Luke 4:18-21 with Isaiah 61:1-2, which Jesus quotes and interprets for us.

2 DETERMINE IF THE PROPHECY HAS BEEN HISTORICALLY FULFILLED.

We should first seek to determine whether other passages of Scripture might reveal the fulfillment of any given prophecy. This lets us know which prophecies are yet to be fulfilled and thus in our future.

One example of this principle is the Flood of Noah which was prophesied 120 years before it occurred (Gen 6:3). Scripture tells us that this was fulfilled (Gen 7-8).

Scripture also prophecies that the Lord will supernaturally regather the nation of Israel (Zech 9:14; Matt 24:31). This prophecy clearly has not yet been fulfilled. We determine this not only from Scripture but also from history.

We have to look at external sources, such as secular history books, to discover if and when some prophecies may have been fulfilled. Remember that secular history is not inspired by God and may disagree with His word at times, but the Bible student always must accept God’s word as accurate.

3 RECOGNIZE THE LANGUAGE OF PROPHECY.

In prophecy we must consider figures of speech (such as the representation of the Lord as the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah” or the “Lamb of God” in Revelation 5), symbols (such as the “Beasts” of Revelation 13), and types (such as the earthly Tabernacle found in Exodus 25-40). It should be obvious by now that first we must look for Biblical explanations of prophetic language.

Remember that speculation is not interpretation. Speculations occur when one guesses at the meaning of prophetic language. It is easy for man to attempt to turn personal speculations into

“doctrines.” We must realize however, that some prophetic language will not be understood until the appropriate time (Dan 12:4,8-10).
