

UNDERSTANDING OUR BIBLE
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We are surveying the four major covenants in the Bible that have to do with what has been called "salvation-history." These covenants are: the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New covenant. Together these covenants bring unity to the overall biblical message of the outworking of God's redemptive purpose for humankind.

I. Review of the Abrahamic Covenant. Last week we briefly traced the Covenant God made with Abraham through the Genesis narratives, and saw something of its presence in the O.T. generally and its fulfillment in the New Testament.

"I will" are the key words that preface each of the aspects of this Covenant. This it is a Covenant of Promise.

- A. Promise of innumerable multitude
- B. Promise of a land and beyond
- C. Promise of blessing to other peoples of the earth
- D. Promise of a unique relationship with God

However, response to the grace of God is necessary, circumcision in the Ab. cov. (Gen. 17).

Karl Barth: The one natural proof for the existence of God is the Jewish nation amongst other nations (*CD* I,2, p.510).

II. Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant

A. A key text that introduces this covenant : Exod. 19:4-6--has been called the heart of Pentateuch

1. Verse 4. The Covenant is made against the backdrop of Israel's mighty deliverance from Egyptian bondage by the power her God. In biblical theology, man's relation to God is a response to God's prior act on behalf of needy human beings.

Cf. 20:1-2.

This liberation from foreign bondage was **EVER REMEMBERED IN ISRAEL**. Psalms refer to it, so it was sung in times of worship. The annual Passover meal commemorated this event of Israel's salvation from slavery--Israel's 4th of July.

Article in Time magazine, 12/30/74. p. 41.

2. Verses 5-6. Emphasis of this covenant--Israel's responsibility to live in obedience to her God. The idea of a Kingdom of God is already inferred, in that Israel is to live under the rule of her God.

B. The Covenant itself--

- 1. Highlighted in the Ten Commandments (20:1-17).

See Deut. 4:13; 1 Kgs. 8:9, 20-21.

Thus this is a Covenant of *Demand* in contrast to the Covenant with Abraham, which was a covenant of *Promise*. This covenant places the emphasis on the necessity for God's people to respond to Him in obedience. In contrast to "I will" (Promise) we have "Thou shalt" (Demand).

2. The outworking of this covenant is seen in various laws for religious and civil life in ancient Israel. We have this especially in the certain parts of Exodus, in Leviticus, certain parts of Numbers, and much of Deuteronomy. Many of these rules and laws pertain to living in ethically and morally in community with one's neighbor, and are what we would call civil laws. Other laws are more religious and ceremonial and pertain sacrificial offerings, keeping of holy days, certain dietary regulations. There is not much of distinction made between the moral and ethical laws and those which are more ritual and ceremonial.

All this is what it meant for ancient Israel to live under the Law in response to the gracious call of God upon her life. They were to give careful attention to keeping all these commandments. If they failed, there was serious consequence. For certain violations of God's law there was death.

C. Relation to the Abrahamic Covenant

1. Continuity with the Abrahamic Covenant, Exod. 6:2-8. Thus the Mosaic Covenant is built on the covenant relationship established with Abraham. Also, a response of obedience is in both covenants.

2. Important Difference:

Abrahamic Cov. a covenant of Promise: "I will" are the key words that introduce each of the promises, which is the dominant part of the covenant.

Mosaic Cov. is a covenant of Demand: "Thou shalt" are key words that express the Divine Commandment. NOTE LEV. 18:5. The necessity of obedience is emphasized in the Mosaic covenant.

Abrahamic Covenant stresses God's Provision; Mosaic stresses Israel's responsibility. HOWEVER, BOTH COVENANTS HAVE GOD'S GRACE AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY. THE DIFFERENCE IS ONE OF EMPHASIS.

3. Significance of both covenants for understanding the Old Testament

1. Israel lived under both covenants, e.g. Deut. 4:1; 6:1-3; Josh. 1:1-9
2. Israel's future successes and failures are explained in relation to these two covenants, which together speak of Israel living in covenant relationship to Yahweh, her God.

See Isa. 48:18-19. The Abrahamic covenant is never eliminated, but it is postponed! In the N.T. it is reinterpreted and fulfilled in relation to Christ and the blessings of covenant relationship that come through faith in Him.

III. Mosaic Covenant and the New Testament

A. Paul's interpretation of the purpose of the Law (3 points here to be made)

1. Law exposes sin, Rom. 3:19-20, (31); 7:7-8.

Paul's understanding, through the Holy Spirit, is that the law served to expose the need for redemption. A new exodus is needed, this time from the bondage to sin.

Paul stands as it were at the start of a new era in God's redemptive plan. He looks back and has an understanding of the purpose of the Law that was not possible during the centuries when Israel was obliged to live with conscious attendance to keeping the varied and many laws of the Mosaic covenant. Paul says Christ is the "end of the Law," Rom. 10:4.

2. Paul makes a strong distinction between the way of faith and the way of law. See Gal. 3:10-14. Here Paul stays with the Abrahamic covenant, but says the Mosaic covenant is no longer in effect.

Paul speaks of the importance of the Law for the time for which it was given, Gal. 3:23-26. He calls this living "under the law," verse 23.

Paul says "works of law" do not justify one before God. One is justified through faith in Jesus Christ, Gal. 2:15-16.

This is not easy theologically, because the Old Covenant itself focused on love of God as the source behind keeping the Law. Deuteronomy is very clear on this, e.g. Deut.6:4-9. Apparently the heart devotion to God Himself was not achieved through this covenant, and all that people were left with were the Mosaic commandments and ordinances, which were supposed to be fulfilled out of love for God. Added to this was the oral tradition that was handed down and effectively assumed a place of equal importance to the divinely given Mosaic Law, Mark 7. Paul reprimands Jews of his day for not themselves keeping the Law, Rom. 2:17-29. Jesus scolded the Jews leaders for the same thing, e.g. Matt. 23.

Paul sees the Law bringing a curse because God's chosen people do not keep it. But Christ has Himself suffered the curse of the Law, so that through faith in Him there is forgiveness and justification. Cf. Deut. 27:26.

3. At the same time Paul says that the Law is established in one who is justified by faith in Christ, Rom. 3:31. This the faith way establishes the Law.

B. The New Covenant as a response to the old Mosaic Covenant

1. Response in the letter to the Hebrews, 8:7-13; 10:15-18

What is the difference between the covenants?

Is there a commonality?

What God *requires* under the Old Covenant, God *provides* in the New Covenant.

The two covenants merge in that the divine "I will" character of the Abrahamic covenant is present in the new covenant. But the old covenant is fulfilled in that the moral and ethical demands of the old covenant are met in the divine provision.

2. Paul' Response: The Holy Spirit makes the difference

Thus the message in Hebrews corresponds to what Paul says in Gal. 3:14 that the promise of the Spirit comes through faith rather than the Law.

Paul goes on to say that the fruit of the Spirit is in moral goodness, against such things things there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23). This is the law being fulfilled! Cf. 2 Cor. 3, esp. vv. 6, 18.

IV. The Christian Life and the New Covenant

A. The fulfillment of the moral and ethical law

The old covenant *law* is now fulfilled in the new. We saw from the Pentateuch this referred essentially to the Ten Commandments. This corresponds with the teaching of Jesus and Romans 13:8, where loving one's neighbor fulfills the Law. It is thus the moral and ethical law that is now incarnated in the true believer. This is what James means when he says that one is justified by "works" and not by faith alone, 2:24. This is the meaning of Matt. 7:13 where Jesus says we should enter into eternal life by the "narrow" gate.

B. Under the new covenant the Law is now obsolete in reference to the ceremonial and ritual requirements such as circumcision, food laws, observing of certain religious days. (e.g. Col. 3:16-17). It may be the fulfilling of such ritual requirements that Paul has in mind when he speaks of "works of law" in contrast to the way of faith.

C. The New Covenant and our Daily Life: *Grace and Law*

The issue today: Article by Rabbi in the Virginian Pilot. Is it true that Christians need not fulfill demands to receive blessings from God?

1. What is the role of law in our life?

If fulfillment of the law of loving one's neighbor, serving the body of Christ, etc. is absent, can one say he/she is in the new covenant?

2. Are we in danger of living "under law"?

How does one live the life of freedom from law while still under the yoke Christian disciplines?

3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in OUR daily life?