

I. AN INTRODUCTION TO GOD'S COVENANTS WITH MEN

A. THE MEANING OF THE WORD COVENANT

Merrill Unger defined a covenant as, "the term applied to various transactions between God and man, and man and his fellow-man. It is also rendered league." (Unger, 224)

Charles Lincoln has defined the word as follows:

"A divine covenant is (1) a sovereign disposition of God, whereby He establishes an unconditional or declarative compact with man, obligating Himself, in grace, by the untrammelled formula, "I will," to bring to pass of Himself definite blessings for the covenanted ones, or (2) a proposal of God, wherein He promises, in a conditional or mutual compact with man, by the contingent formula, "If ye will," to grant special blessings to man provided he fulfills perfectly certain conditions, and to execute definite punishment in the case of his failure." (Lincoln, 25,26)

B. THE VARIOUS COVENANTS MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPTURES

1. Some covenants in the Scriptures were made between one individual with another individual (Gen. 21:32; I Sam. 18:3).
2. Some covenants were made between one individual and a certain group (Gen. 26:28; I Sam. 11:1,2).
3. Some covenants were made between nations (Ex. 23:32; 34:12,15; Hos. 12:1).
4. Some 6 covenants were made between God and men (Gen.9:9-17; Gen. 12:1-3; Dt. 30:1-10; II Sam. 7:10-16; Jer. 31:31-40; Dt. 28:1-68).

C. THE TWO KINDS OF COVENANTS GOD HAS MADE WITH MEN

1. God has made five ***unconditional*** covenants with Israel, meaning He has obligated Himself to fulfill the things promised without anything being contingent on Israel's part. Each of these covenants follow a formula in which God has said, "I will." So as we look at these covenants this formula is either stated emphatically or expressed. Note the formula stated: Noahic (Gen. 9:9-17); Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1-3); Palestinian (Dt. 10:1-10); Davidic (II Sam. 7:10-16); New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-40).
2. The second kind of covenant which God made with Israel was ***conditional***. This kind of covenant called for certain things to be fulfilled on Israel's part and the promises and blessings were contingent upon man fulfilling certain requirement. This was the basis the Mosaic Covenant and it followed the formula, "If ye will." Note this teaching in Dt. 28:1-14; 15-68. Obviously, because of failure on man's part, the promises and blessings of this covenant were not realized.

D. THE CRITERIA FOR A COVENANT TO HAVE FUTURE IMPLICATIONS IN GOD'S PROPHETIC PROGRAM.

1. Firstly, for a covenant to have significance in God's prophetic program it had to be called a covenant by the Lord.
 - a. We see the Abrahamic Covenant met this criterion and was called a covenant (Gen. 15:18).
 - b. The Palestinian Covenant was also called a covenant (Dt. 29:1).
 - c. The Davidic Covenant was called a covenant (Psa. 89:3; Jer. 33:21).
 - d. And the New Covenant was called a covenant as well (Jer. 31:31).
2. Secondly, for a covenant to have significance in God's prophetic program it had to be confirmed.
 - a. The Scriptures show us that the Abrahamic covenant was confirmed by the Lord (Gen. 15; 17:6-8; 22:15-18).
 - b. In like manner the Palestinian Covenant was confirmed by the Lord (Dt. 29,30:3).
 - c. Then we see the Davidic Covenant was confirmed by the Lord (Psa. 89:34-36; Isa. 9:6,7; Dan. 7:13,14).
 - d. Finally we also see the New Covenant was confirmed as well (Isa. 61:8,9; Ezek. 37:21-28).
3. Thirdly, for a covenant to have significance in God's prophetic program it had to continue through successive generations as something eternal to be literally fulfilled.
 - a. The Abrahamic Covenant is an eternal covenant which has continued through successive generations and will be fulfilled literally in God's prophetic program (Heb. 6:13-18; Gen. 15:8-21; 17:7,13,19).
 - b. The Palestinian Covenant is an eternal covenant which has continued through successive generations and will also be filled literally one day in God's prophetic program (Ezek. 16:60,62).
 - c. The Davidic Covenant is also an eternal covenant which has continued through successive generations and will be fulfilled literally one day in God's prophetic program (Lk. 1:68-72; Acts 15:16,17).
 - d. Finally, the New Covenant is an eternal covenant which has continued through successive generations and will be literally fulfilled in God's prophetic program (Isa. 61:8; Jer. 32:40; Heb. 13:20).

E. SOME DISTINCTIONS TO BE OBSERVED WITH THE COVENANTS

1. There are some who believe there was an Edenic Covenant (Gen. 2:16) and an Adamic Covenant (Gen. 3:15) which were made, but these are not called covenants and therefore do not meet the criteria for covenants. These do, however, refer to obligations within the dispensation of Innocence and the dispensation of Conscience.
2. There are two covenants which have no prophetic significance.
 - a. It should be understood that the Mosaic Covenant which God made with Israel was a **conditional** and temporary covenant and it has no determining features in God's prophetic program.
 - b. Notice also while the Noahic Covenant (Gen. 9:9) meets all the criteria as an **unconditional** covenant, it, like the Mosaic Covenant has no determining features in God's prophetic program with Israel.

This means there are only four eternal covenants which God has made with man and these are all unconditional in that God has obligated Himself to fulfill these as part of his prophetic program.

3. There is a word of caution concerning the covenants.
 - a. Firstly, we should discern that the covenants which God made are with His covenanted people **Israel** and concern their disposition in future fulfillments.
 - b. Secondly, we should understand that the promises made to individuals must not be transferred or applied to the Nation Israel. In the same sense, promises made to the Nation Israel should not be transferred or applied to the Gentiles or to the church (Pentecost, 65-69).