

The Biblical Covenants & Eschatology

End Times Series

Eschatology

Since we are studying the Book of Revelation let's introduce the term Eschatology which means the study or doctrine of the last things. Eschatology is derived from the combination of the Greek *eschatos*, meaning "last," and *logos*, meaning "word" or "significance." The doctrine of last things normally focuses on a discussion of the return of Christ at the end of the age, the coming judgments, various expressions of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, the nature of the glorified body, and the prospects for eternal destiny . ¹

Biblical writings understand history as a linear movement towards a goal. God is driving history towards the ultimate fulfillment of His purposes for His creation. So biblical eschatology is not limited to the destiny of the individual; it concerns the consummation of the whole history of the world, towards which all God's redemptive acts in history are directed. ²

Biblical Covenants

God's eschatological program is determined and prescribed by His covenants contained in the Bible. Therefore, it is important when studying the Book of Revelation and Eschatology to understand the Biblical covenants.

The word covenant occurs frequently in both the Old and New Testaments. It is used in relationships between God and man, man and man, and nation and nation. A divine covenant is a sovereign disposition of God, where by He establishes an unconditional or declarative compact with man, obligating Himself, in grace, to bring to pass a definite blessing for the covenanted ones or a proposal of God in a conditional or mutual compact with man, to grant special blessings to man provided man fulfills perfectly certain conditions and to execute definite punishment in case of man's failure. ³

Since we are specifically studying the things to come we will only study the four eternal covenants given by God in relation to the prophetic program. We will focus on the following covenants: Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and the New Covenant. These Biblical covenants are literal, unconditional in character, eternal and all made with a covenant people, Israel. (Rom 9:4; Eph 2:11-12). ⁴

The Abrahamic Covenant

The covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 and confirmed and enlarged to him in Genesis 12:6-7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-4; 22:15-18, entitled certain basic promises. The things promised by God are the following:

1. That Abraham's name shall be great.
2. That a great nation should come from him.
3. He should be a blessing so great that in him shall all families of the earth be blessed.
4. To him personally and to his seed should be given Palestine forever to inherit.
5. The multitude of his seed should be as the dust of the earth.
6. That whoever blessed him should be blessed and whosoever cursed him should be cursed.
7. He should be the father of many nations.
8. Kings should proceed from him.
9. The covenant shall be perpetual, "an everlasting covenant."
10. The land of Canaan shall be "an everlasting possession."
11. God will be a God to him and to his seed.
12. His seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.
13. In his seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

As you can see, certain individual promises were given to Abraham, certain national promises given to the nation Israel and certain universal blessings that encompassed all nations were given to him. In the development of this covenant it is important to keep the different areas in which promises were made clearly in mind so as not to confuse or transfer things covenanted in one area to another area. Much biblical mis-interpretation can follow if these areas are mixed up. ⁵

There are a couple of important conclusions that can be made from this covenant that we need to keep in mind when studying the book of Revelation and things to come:

- Israel as a nation has a future yet in prospect.
- Israel must yet come into possession of the land, for she has never fully possessed it in her history. ⁶

There are things *yet to come*.

Palestinian Covenant

The Palestinian Covenant is God's commitment to provide a land for Israel under messianic blessing. It is an amplification and enlargement of parts of the Abrahamic Covenant. In the closing chapters of the book of Deuteronomy the children of Israel are facing a crisis in their national existence. They are standing at the entrance to the land that was promised to them by God but this land is possessed by Israel's enemies, who have shown they will resist any and all attempts by Israel to enter the land. It is impossible for them to return to Egypt as a slave nation and the land before them seems shut.

God again answers them with His covenant promise for Israel's possession of the inheritance of the land. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness and unbelief the covenant was unconditional and remains for Israel.

“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. “If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. “The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. “Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. “The Lord your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. “And you shall again obey the Lord, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. “Then the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; if you obey the Lord your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.” (Deuteronomy 30:1–10, NASB95)

There are 7 main features of this Covenant:

1. The nation will be plucked off the land for its unfaithfulness (Deut 28:63-68; 30:1-3)
2. There will be a future repentance of Israel (Deut 28:63-68; 30:1-3)
3. Their Messiah will return (Deut 30:3-6)

4. Israel will be restored to the land (Deut 30:5)
5. Israel will be converted as a nation (Deut 30:4-8; Rom 11:26-27)
6. Israel's enemies will be judged (Deut 30:7)
7. The nation will then receive her full blessing (Deut 30:9)

This same covenant is confirmed at a later time in Israel's history by Ezekiel's prophecy.

“Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. “Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. “Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord,” (Ezekiel 16:60–62, NASB95)

Several things for us to keep in mind at this point of our study:

- Portions of this covenant have already been fulfilled literally. Israel has experienced the dispersions as judgments for unfaithfulness. Israel has experienced restorations to the land and awaits the final restoration.
- It is clear that God takes Israel's relation to the land as a matter of extreme importance. He not only guarantees its possession to them, but will Himself judge, remove all Israel's enemies, give the nation a new heart, a conversion, prior to placing them in the land. ⁷

The implications for our study are also clear. On the basis of a literal fulfillment Israel must be:

- Converted as a nation.
- Regathered from her world-wide dispersion.
- Installed in her land, which she is made to possess.
- Witness the judgment of her enemies.
- Receive the material blessings promised her. ⁸

Since these things have never been fulfilled, they are *yet to come*.

The Davidic Covenant

In the Davidic Covenant, God is enlarging and confirming the seed promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. The seed promises in general and the seed line of David, with his kingdom, house and throne are amplified.

“When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom.” (2 Samuel 7:12, NASB95)

“I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, I will establish your seed forever And build up your throne to all generations.” Selah.” (Psalm 89:3–4, NASB95)

“As the host of heaven cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.’ ” (Jeremiah 33:22, NASB95)

“Thus says the Lord, ‘If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.’ ” (Jeremiah 33:25–26, NASB95)

David has come to power and authority in the kingdom and now dwelt in a house of cedar. It was David’s purpose to build a suitable dwelling place for God. Because David had been a man of war, David was not permitted to build this house. That responsibility was left to Solomon. However, God does make certain promises to David concerning the perpetuity of his house in this Covenant:

1. David is to have a child, yet to be born, who shall succeed him and establish his kingdom
2. This son (Solomon) shall build the temple instead of David
3. The throne of his kingdom shall be established forever.
4. The throne will not be taken away from him (Solomon) even though his sins justify chastisement.
5. David’s house, throne, and kingdom shall be established forever. ⁹

In order for prophecy to be fulfilled there are several things for us to keep in mind regarding Israel’s future:

1. Israel must be preserved as a nation.
2. Israel must have a national existence and be brought back into the land of her inheritance. Since David’s kingdom had definite geographical boundaries and those boundaries were made a feature of the promise to David concerning his son’s reign, the land must be given to this nation as the site of their national homeland.

3. Davids' Son (lineage), the Lord Jesus Christ, must return to the earth, bodily and literally, in order to reign over David's covenanted kingdom. The allegation that Christ is seated on the Father's throne reigning over a spiritual kingdom, the church, simply does not fulfill the promises of the covenant.
4. A literal earthly kingdom must be constituted over which the returned Messiah reigns.
5. This kingdom must become an eternal kingdom. Since the throne, house and kingdom were all promised to David in perpetuity, there must be no end to Messiah's reign over David's kingdom from David's throne. ¹⁰

As you can see, the Davidic covenant is of vital importance to the understanding of future events.

The New Covenant

Let's begin by reviewing the New Covenant and then we will examine how it applies to us and to Israel. Most of us probably know how the New Covenant applies to us as believers but how does it apply to Israel?

The term New Covenant was given by Jeremiah for a new arrangement between God and man in which the law would be written in their hearts rather than on tablets of stone or the Ten Commandments (Mosaic Law). It is also an alternate translation of the Greek words (*kainē diathēkē*) that are normally translated 'New Testament' which also gave rise to the designation of the new Christian's Scriptures as the New Testament. ¹¹

This New Covenant is the fulfillment of God's purposes of salvation expressed in the covenants of the Old Testament, mediated by Jesus Christ and sealed in His blood. It is a covenant of grace, the benefits of which include forgiveness, a renewed relationship with God and, through the Holy Spirit, an inward transformation that enables obedience to its demands and so ensures that it will not again be broken. ¹²

The quotation of Jeremiah 31:31–34 in Hebrews 8:8–12 is the longest Old Testament quotation found in the New Testament. This quotation explains that the new covenant will one day supersede the old covenant. The theme of the new covenant dominates the book of Hebrews, which was written to encourage faltering Christians by demonstrating the superiority of the Christian faith over older Jewish beliefs and practices.

The writer compares the new covenant to a person's "will" throughout the book of Hebrews, tying the two different meanings of the word *diathēkē*, "covenant" and "will" together. Just as the stipulations of a will go into effect when a person dies, so Christ

died to initiate the new covenant—the covenant that frees us from bondage to the law of God, or the “old covenant.”¹³

The expression “new covenant” is found at least six times in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24) . Jesus saw the Lord’s Supper as instituting a different, and therefore, new covenant. (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). The covenant was sealed by His own sacrificial death, and the cup of the Lord’s Supper symbolizes the blood of Christ’s sacrifice. Every time we gather to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we are celebrating the new covenant; the wonderful truth that Christ died to save us from our sins and give us new life.¹⁴

What about Israel? Has God fulfilled the covenant He made with Israel? According to the Scriptures that we have reviewed and several that we have not reviewed (Hosea 2:18-20; Isaiah 55:3; Ezekiel 16:60, 62:20:37; 34: 25-26) Israel must be regathered and restored to *the land* promised by God and then experience the blessings of the new covenant *in the land*. History records no such sequence. This means that these events are still to come.

Remember the covenant is made with Israel and not the church. This does not mean that we as believers and Gentiles do not receive the blessing, obviously we do. By faith Gentiles can become the children of Abraham (Rom 4:16; Gal 3:7) and thus become participants in the New Covenant. It just means that for Israel the New Covenant is not yet realized. Christ instituted the covenant but Israel as a nation will not realize it until it is confirmed and made actual to them at the second advent (coming) of Christ, when all Israel shall be saved. Rom 11:26-27

In summary, the four eternal covenants that we have just studied, Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, and the New Covenant are unconditional, made with a covenant people, Israel, and are to be fulfilled because of the faithfulness of God. These covenants not only tell us how God has dealt with His people over the years but also tell us how God is going to deal with Israel in future events. In reviewing the covenants there are seven great features:

1. A nation forever
2. A land forever
3. A King forever
4. A throne forever
5. A kingdom forever
6. A new covenant
7. Abiding blessings (15)

What an awesome God we serve!

So what are we to do? We are called to share the good news of the New Covenant with those who have not experienced it. We are to realize that we live in an age where a lot of people do not want to hear anything about God but our calling does not change. God desires that all be saved.

End Notes

1. Powell, M. A. (Ed.). (2011). new covenant. In *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)*. New York: HarperCollins.
2. Manser, M. H. (2009). *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser.
3. Pentecost, J. Dwight (1958). Things To Come A Study In Biblical Eschatology. Zondervan Publishing House, pg 67-68.
4. Pentecost, (Ibid), pg 69.
5. Pentecost, (Ibid), pg 72-73.
6. Pentecost, (Ibid), pg 85.
7. Pentecost, (Ibid), pg 97.
8. Pentecost, (Ibid), pg 97-99.
9. Pentecost, (Ibid), pg 112-113.
10. Pentecost, (Ibid), pg 114-115.
11. Powell, M. A. (Ed.). (2011). new covenant. In *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)*. New York: HarperCollins.
12. Manser, M. H. (2009). *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser.
13. Carpenter, E. E., & Comfort, P. W. (2000). In *Holman treasury of key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew words defined and explained*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
14. Carpenter, E. E., & Comfort, P. W. (2000). In *Holman treasury of key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew words defined and explained*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers
15. Pentecost, (Ibid), pg 128.