

The Covenants and the Prophets

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COVENANTS

- A. The covenants are one of the central themes of the Scripture. The covenants set the context for the way God relates to His people throughout biblical history. Because of this it is important to understand the covenants to understand biblical history. The covenants are not just part of our history, they are part of our present, and part of our future.
- B. Because the word covenant is not frequently used, it is important to understand what a biblical covenant is.
 - 1. A covenant at its most basic level is a “contract,” but in a biblical context it is more than a contract. We do contracts for many things from houses to phones. Modern contracts are legal agreements that do not really move our emotions or involve the commitment of our person, and this makes them very different from biblical covenants. Modern contracts are almost always temporary and usually have escape clauses. Contracts are an exchange of resources, not a commitment of our person. Biblical covenants may have conditions, but they are designed to be permanent agreements.
 - 2. Marriage is one of the best pictures of biblical covenant. Marriage is a contract, but it is more than a contract. The emotions and commitment involved in marriage help to form a more complete picture of what a covenant is than the word contract does. This is why, throughout Scripture, God frequently compares His relationship to His people to a marriage. The fact that God compares His relationship to marriage gives us a lot of revelation about His emotions in covenant.
 - 3. When He makes covenant, God offers Himself and He has strong emotions related to that. This is why he tells Israel that His name is “Jealous” – a statement that is both a promise and a threat. Like a husband, He will fight for what is His (Exodus 34:14).
- C. God only makes a few covenants in the Bible and He remembers these agreements. He remembers the emotions in His heart on the day they were made. He remembers the emotions of the people and the expressions on their faces. He remembers how Abraham and Israel trembled at His voice. He even remembers the heat of the sun and the wind blowing across the desert.
- D. Covenants are important to God and therefore they should be important to us. In this session we will look at how the covenant made at Sinai relates to other covenants in the Scripture and why understanding it is critical to understanding the end times.

II. WHY STUDY THE COVENANTS

A. *To Encounter God's Emotions –*

1. The covenants reveal the depth of God's emotions as He relates to His people. God vividly expresses His emotions for His people in the Scripture as He recounts the covenants and speaks concerning Israel's sin, Israel's deliverance, and His plans for the nations.
2. When we study topics such as Israel and the end times, it is incredibly important that we do not miss the emotions of God related to those events. If we are not careful we can study the details of God's plan for Israel and end-time events, but miss God's emotions in those events. Those emotions are usually expressed in Scripture in context to the covenants He has made.

B. *To Understand the Nature of God –*

1. God primarily reveals Himself in Scripture by what He does, and one of the primary ways that we learn what God is like is by understanding His interactions with men and His leadership in history.
2. We know God is patient and faithful, not just because He declares this, but also because of how He relates to Israel and how He relates to us.
3. God's dealings with the nations, and particularly with Israel, are a revelation of who He is. When we neglect the Old Testament, and the covenants it contains, we are missing a significant revelation of who God is. We must understand the God who makes covenant because the revelation of the God of the Old Testament is the revelation of Jesus. When this is neglected, the person of Jesus becomes separated from the God of the Old Testament. The church rejected this ancient heresy, known as Marcionism, but the essential idea is still prevalent among many believers.

C. *To Understand God's Plan –*

1. These covenants are also part of Jesus' story. They set the context for His coming and identify the questions He answers. The covenants proclaim His coming. We cannot understand Jesus, what He taught, and what He did if we do not understand the covenants. Jesus' coming did not discard the Old Testament. Jesus secured the promises of the Old Testament, dealt with the threats against the promises, and enlarged the Old Testament promises.
2. The biblical authors assume that you are familiar with previous revelation. For example, the apostles preached out of the Old Testament. They preached the glory of Jesus out of the covenants. If we do not understand the covenant we are missing on material that illuminates Jesus. They did not have another Bible, so they assumed the people were familiar with many things that we are not familiar with.

3. To understand what the apostles wrote, we must understand what they were familiar with. We cannot fully understand Jesus, Paul or the rest of the New Testament authors unless we understand the foundations they were building on.

D. *To Understand Modern Events –*

1. When you understand the covenants, you can recognize God’s activity in the nations. Many believers wonder if God is as active in the nations as He was in Old Testament times, and understanding the covenants helps us to recognize God’s present leadership of the nations.
2. The verses in the Bible are far more literal than we think. We tend to think that the Old Testament is the “old stuff” that is passed, but the ancient covenants of the Bible are actually affecting the nations in our generation.

E. *To Understand Bible Prophecy and the End Times*

1. It is important to understand the “why” behind the “what” of end-time events. The end time events are not isolated events. Many of the major themes and events in the end times are all determined by the covenants.
2. Sometimes students of Bible prophecy focus nearly entirely on the events of the end times, but it is important to recognize the biblical context of those events. If we focus on the events without understanding the overall context, then we can miss the overall story of redemption.
3. If you show up for the final scene of a play, or read the final chapter of the book, you may appreciate the conclusion, but you will miss significant parts of the story. When we neglect the covenants, we do not understand what is happening or why it is happening. The end time events are the conclusion to a story that God develops throughout history.
4. Isaiah tells us how to interpret prophecy:
²⁰To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20 NKJV)
 - a. Contextually Isaiah is rebuking the people for seeking false spiritual guides for prophetic insight. Isaiah is telling us that prophecy must be according to the law and the testimony. The covenants of the law are the context for prophecy.
 - b. Prophecy reminds the people of God’s covenant and looks forward to the resolution of the covenants. True prophecy exists within a covenantal context. It is God speaking to the situation of the people with relationship to the covenant and predicting the resolution of the covenant crisis.

III. THE CONTEXT OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

- A. To understand the covenant of the Old Testament, it is important to recognize that there are two different kinds of covenants in the Old Testament. In some covenants, God takes complete responsibility for the fulfillment of the covenant and mentions only blessings. In contrast, in the covenant at Sinai, God mentions both blessings and curses, which are dependent on the obedience of the people. We could call these two kinds of covenants conditional and unconditional, but that is not the best language, because even though the covenant at Sinai has conditions for blessing and curses, God's commitment to Israel remains unconditional.
- B. The first covenant God makes related to Israel is not contingent at all on Israel's obedience. Its success is secured entirely by God. It is the first of three key covenants related to Israel that are built on God's promises, based on God's faithfulness alone, and do not contain the threat of curses for disobedience. Through the Abrahamic covenant, we see the union of God's supernatural power and our response in the birth of Isaac. Abraham and Sarah had to play their part, but the fulfillment of the promise depended on God's supernatural power.
1. The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12, 15)
 2. The Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7)
 3. New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-40)
- C. In each of these covenants, God takes full responsibility for the execution of the covenant. When we read these covenants, we notice the prevalence of God's "I will" statements where He takes full responsibility for fulfilling the covenant.
- D. These covenants all flow from the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12. In Genesis 12, God makes three key promises to Abraham:
- ¹Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. ²I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3 NKJV)***
1. He will have descendants. (By implication, these descendants will be righteous because biblically, the unrighteous will be cut off.)
 2. His descendants will inherit a specific land.
 3. All the nations will be blessed by the first two promises.
- E. In the promises made to Abraham, it is implied that there will be resistance against God's chosen plan to execute these promise because God's gives Abraham a summary of how He will evaluate the nations related to this promise. This is developed much greater in the prophets in passages such as Isaiah 34, Joel 3, Zechariah 14, and Matthew 25:31-46.

³I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you... (Genesis 12:3a NKJV)

- F. These three promises undergird the covenants and are ultimately fulfilled by God’s plan. The biblical narrative is the unfolding of God’s plan to fulfill all three of these elements of His promise, and all three of them must be fulfilled. Though these promises are made at the beginning of the Old Testament, the New Testament affirms them.
1. Jesus’ refusal to enter Jerusalem as King until the Jews welcome Him also enforces His commitment to the first two promises. The age won’t end until Israel comes into her promises.
³⁹for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ ” (Matthew 23:39 NKJV)
 2. Jesus’ prediction that the gospel must go to every nation, and His command to disciple nations, reveals His commitment to the third promise made to Abraham.
¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 NKJV)
¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19 NKJV)
 3. Jesus affirms all three promises in the book of Acts. The disciple’s expectation of a restored kingdom in Israel after listening to Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom reveals Jesus’ emphasis on the fulfillment of the first two promises. Jesus’ command to go to the gentile nations reveals His affirmation of the third promise.
⁶Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:6–8 NKJV)
 4. Paul emphasizes the centrality of these promises in Romans 10-11. In Romans 10-11 Paul explains how the nations are blessed through Israel’s disobedience and how the gentiles who receive the gospel will participate in God’s plan to fulfill the promises He made to Israel. Paul affirms all three promises made to Abraham in Romans 10-11.
 5. In the book of Hebrews, the author affirms that the New Covenant both provides salvation for all and does what the covenant at Sinai could not do – it brings Israel into her promises (Hebrews 8). Again, we see the salvation of Israel joined with blessing for all people.

- G. For the last two thousand years Christian theology has emphasized the “all nations” part of the promise, but we must recognize all three components of the promise because the New Covenant is committed to fulfilling all three. God does not make promises He cannot fulfill. His promises end up being far more than we would assume in the beginning, but never less. Abraham and David will be shocked by how expansive God’s promise is, but not because it ends up being a different promise entirely.
- H. When we look at the events of the end times, we find that the rage of the enemy is primarily directed at these three core promises because God’s honor that is at stake in the fulfillment of these promises. These are the three main positive promises of the covenants that must be resolved for the age to end and this is why these three promises are the most contested. It is important to recognize that these promises have been more contested in the last century than at any other time in history. We cannot afford to be ignorant of these trends and what they mean.
1. The salvation of the Jewish people is contested because of the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-40 and Matthew 23:39 is that the age cannot end without their salvation. This promise is contested even to the point of the enemy seeking to exterminate them as a people (Daniel 7:21; Revelation 12:17). Revelation 12:16-17 connects persecution of gentile believers to the enemy’s attempt to destroy the Jewish people.
 - a. In the last century, we had the largest assault on the destiny of the Jewish people yet. The Holocaust attempted an entire extermination of the Jewish people – something even Babylon and Rome did not attempt.
 - b. At the same time, there has been unprecedented salvation among the Jewish people in the last several decades.
 2. The Bible tells us that the age ends in a contest over Jewish possession of the land (Isaiah 34; 63; Joel 3; Zechariah 12-14; Revelation 11). In our modern day, one of the few things that humanists and Islamists can agree on is that Israel does not have a promise related to the land.
 - a. The controversy over who owns the land is the most intense it has been in history. It is now a global, and not a regional, issue.
 - b. At the same time, Israel remains in the land forcing the issue of the covenant.
 3. The Bible predicts that a remnant in all the nations must worship Israel’s God before the age can end (Matthew 24:14; Romans 10:19-21; Revelation 5:9; 7:9).
 - a. More Christians have been martyred in the last century than in all previous centuries combined.
 - b. At the same time, evangelization in the nations is beyond anything in previous history. Millions have come to the gospel and we have seen mega crusades in places like Africa.

IV. THE COVENANT MADE AT SINAI

A. The covenant made at Sinai is also a key covenant in understanding the story of Israel, and it plays an important part in God's plan to fulfill His promises. Because the New Covenant supersedes the Mosaic covenant, many believers disregard this covenant, but it is important to understand the role that this covenant plays in Israel's history.

B. When God made covenant with Israel in the desert, He came down visibly on a mountain and spoke audibly to an entire nation and invited them to come into covenant with Him as a people. He has never done that before or since. The event is unique in all of redemptive history. An entire nation heard Him and saw Him as fire on the mountain.

³³Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? ³⁴Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deuteronomy 4:33–34 NKJV)

C. Sinai was not just a legal agreement for YHWH. It was an intensely emotional experience and a significant part of His redemptive plan. When He refers to it centuries later, He describes it using tender language. Even though Israel rebelled against Him in the wilderness, when God looked back at this time, He remembered Israel with deep emotion and affection.

²“Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown. (Jeremiah 2:2 NKJV)

D. The covenant at Sinai is significant in Israel's history, and it is different from the covenant made with Abraham because it contains both blessings and threats that are dependent on the obedience of the people. The outcome of this covenant is dependent on the obedience of the people, and this is very different from the covenants that are contingent only on God's faithfulness.

1. The nation of Israel affirmed the terms of this covenant audibly with God. This bound them to the terms and conditions of the covenant, both for better and for worse.
2. God makes several “I will” statements in this covenant, which are summarized in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30. God promises to do specific things in response to the obedience of the people, and promises to do other things in response to the rebellion of the people.
3. Even though the disobedience of the people positions them for judgment according to the terms of the covenant, God promises that, regardless of Israel's sin, He will remember the previous covenants made with Abraham and remain fully committed to securing Israel's future. This means that the covenant controversy will be resolved. Israel will enjoy the promises and the threats will be dealt with.

⁴⁴Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I

am the LORD their God. ⁴⁵But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.’ ” (Leviticus 26:44–45 NKJV)

- E. Israel’s tragic story reveals that the people were never able to remain obedient to the promise they made. In Romans 7, Paul describes the agony of not being able to do the good that he wanted to do and doing the evil that he did not want to do. In the same manner, the covenant made with Sinai put all of Israel into a corporate Romans 7 crisis.
1. Israel was unable to fulfill their destiny in their own strength and therefore they were constantly in danger of judgment.
 2. This is why Paul tells us in Galatians that the law was a “tutor” to bring us to Jesus. The covenant at Sinai exposes the fact that man will never be obedient to God in his own strength. Even when blessings are offered for obedience, and curses apply for disobedience, man cannot secure God’s blessings in his own strength.
 3. Jesus emphasizes this in the Sermon on the Mount when He reveals that even all the laws that had been devised to help they people obey the covenant were actually missing the core issue which is that the heart wants to sin even if the body is controlled.
 4. This is because the issue of Israel is the issue of man. Israel is a mirror in which the nations see the crisis of all men.
- F. Many people consider the covenant of Sinai to be done away with, but this is not what the Bible says. Paul tells us that Jesus is the end of the covenant for all those who are in Him. Only once we have come to Jesus does the authority of the “tutor” of Sinai pass away.

⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4 NKJV)

²⁴Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Galatians 3:24–25 NKJV)

1. The covenant made at Sinai is a tutor intended to steward the nation of Israel to Jesus. This means that Israel remains under that covenant until they are brought to Jesus. Many individuals within natural Israel have come to Jesus since the first century, but all of Israel must come to Jesus to see the covenant end. Individual salvation has always existed among the Jewish people, but God wants more than that – He wants corporate salvation of all of Israel.
2. This means for the covenant to pass away completely, all of Israel must be saved – something predicted numerous times in the Old Testament and reaffirmed by Paul in the New Testament (Deuteronomy 30:1-6; Isaiah 4:3; 45:17, 25; 54:13; 59:21; 60:21; Jeremiah 31:34; 32:40; Ezekiel 20:40; 39:22, 28-29; Joel 2:26; Zephaniah 12:13; Romans 11:26). Until that moment, corporate Israel is subject to the covenant.

- G. It is important that we understand the nature of this covenant, because we are experiencing the effects of the Sinai covenant in front of us right now. God's actions with modern Israel reveal the ongoing operation of the covenant of Sinai on the corporate people of Israel. This has positive and negative dimensions:
1. **Positive** – Israel is back in the land, because God is giving corporate Israel another chance to respond to the covenant crisis of Sinai so that she can dwell in the land permanently in peace and safety.
 2. **Negative** – Though Israel is in the land, she is experiencing trouble and harassment. She has a foreign army within her borders. The Scripture tells us that God is always speaking any time Israel is harassed by foreign armies, so we must ask what is God saying to corporate Israel? What are the theological implications of the fact that Israel has armed enemies operating within her borders?

V. UNDERSTANDING THE DISCIPLINE OF THE COVENANT

- A. When we look at the summary of the covenant in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30 one of the main things that sticks out to us is the warning of God's covenant discipline. It is important that we understand His discipline to understand these passages properly. If we do not understand His discipline then we can misinterpret these passages and miss God's heart.
1. The cross is the beginning of any conversation about God's discipline. God revealed His nature on the cross so we can trust Him in His discipline.
 2. God cannot overlook sin and His discipline is serious and real. At the same time, neither is He a vindictive tyrant just waiting to cut off His people.
 3. It is important to understand the severity of His discipline, the purpose of His discipline, and His love for mercy. If we do not understand God's discipline towards Israel, we do not understand His discipline in our own lives.
- B. God's discipline of Israel was like the discipline of a loving father.

⁷If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? (Hebrews 12:7 NKJV)

1. A loving father magnifies the consequences of disobedience, not out of a longing to punish, but to emphasize the severity and danger of sin. God emphasizes His discipline out of concern for Israel's covenant destiny. A loving father warns their child of running out into the street, not because a car will hit the child every time, but because of the disastrous consequences of just one accident.

2. God's discipline has to be real for His law to be real. If there are no negative consequences for breaking the law, then the law is not real and the father is not really concerned about his children. Children learn what rules in their family are real based on which rules their parents enforce. God emphasizes the consequences of disobedience because He knows how serious sin is and He must demonstrate His zeal for righteousness. When limits are not enforced, sin grows worse. We see in Israel's history that when God delays judgment, sin increases.
- C. God's judgments on Israel were not arbitrary. They were a result of the covenant and God used them to steward Israel's calling. If we don't understand God's discipline, His judgments shock us.
1. ***He Warned Them of Something Worse than Temporal Suffering*** – God's judgments warned Israel of the ultimate end of sin. God would not be kind if He did not warn them of the eternal repercussions of deeds done in time and space, and His temporal corrections are an expression of His kindness. The pain of sin in this life warns us of the end of sin in eternity.
 - a. Israel was judged by the nations when Israel embraced the nations because God wanted to show the end of the way of the nations. In other words, sin appears enjoyable, but leads to death.
 - b. The way of the nations seemed attractive to Israel, but the nations ultimately oppressed Israel to show the people that the way of the nations ultimately had disastrous effects.
 - c. God does not wait for eternity to reveal the results of sin. Physical suffering for sin is the natural result of physical sin.
 2. ***He Preserved the Purpose of His people*** – God disciplined his children like sons. He corrects those He dearly and tenderly loves. The Scripture contains shocking language about God's judgments. At times He seems to delight in the judgment of His people and this seems incompatible to us with the idea of a loving father, but these words are actually an expression of God's strong love for Israel.
 - a. God will delight to cut off any behavior or any people that threaten Israel's covenant destiny. He destroys the wicked to ensure that His plans for all of Israel will come to pass.
 - b. He cuts off those who threaten the corporate purpose of His people out of commitment to His plan.

- D. God's judgments are described as the vengeance of the covenant (Leviticus 26:25). The "Vengeance of the Covenant" is best understood as the strength of His love. Why is there vengeance in the covenant? Because those who transgress the covenant are endangering the future of God's people. The covenant executes punishment because the covenant is stewarding a people for the day when they can embrace Jesus. That stewardship requires keeping a people from the ways of the nations, and He will remove everything that hinders His plan.
1. If God was vindictive and His goal was destruction then He would cast the people away for their sin, but the language of the covenant is the exact opposite. At the end of all the covenant threats in Leviticus 26, God declares that He is fully committed to Israel's future. The end of His promise of discipline is His commitment to secure His people's future.
⁴⁴Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. ⁴⁵But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.' " (Leviticus 26:44–45 NKJV)
 2. When God speaks of His relationship to Israel when they are unfaithful, He reminds the people that He hates divorce.
¹⁶"For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the LORD of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously." (Malachi 2:16 NKJV)
 3. It is also important to remember that the vengeance of the covenant has two expressions. It is first poured out on Israel, but it is then released on the nations. He judges those in Israel who resist His covenant purposes, but then He judges the nations for resisting His covenant purposes for Israel (Isaiah 34; Joel 3; Zechariah 14). God's judgment is His stewardship of Israel's purposes and He releases it all who threaten Israel's purposes whether they are inside or outside of Israel.
²For the indignation of the LORD is against all nations, And His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter... ⁸For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, The year of recompense for the cause of Zion. (Isaiah 34:2, 8 NKJV)
²I will also gather all nations, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there On account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land. (Joel 3:2 NKJV)

- E. God's discipline is always the discipline of a father. That is demonstrated by the way He looks at the time Israel spent in the wilderness. Israel was mostly rebellious at this time and God released His judgments on Israel multiple times. However, when God remembers Israel's wandering in the wilderness, God remembers it as the "love of your betrothal, when you went after Me..." This reveals God's deep emotions towards Israel. He cannot overlook her sin, but when He looks back at this time, He sees it as primarily a time of love and commitment rather than primarily as a time of rebellion.

²"Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown. (Jeremiah 2:2 NKJV)

VI. THE COVENANTS AND THE PROPHETS

- A. When we fully understand the covenants, we can begin to see how the covenants undergird the proclamations of the prophets. The covenants are the foundation from which they spoke. The covenants are what set in motion the judgment the prophets declared and are what also secure the promises and hope that they proclaimed. This biblical context helps us to better understand the prophets and the entire biblical story. We have to recognize that the nation is under the covenant discipline of Sinai until the covenant is resolved.
- B. The book of Daniel is an excellent example of this. The book has several key themes related to the end times. Frequently the book of Daniel is treated as a unique end times book, but its message is actually connected to the rest of the Scripture. When we look closely at Daniel we see that the major themes of Daniel are actually all themes of the covenant.
- C. First, we want to see how Daniel builds on the proclamations of Leviticus 26. There are several themes in Daniel there are simply a result of what God laid out in the covenants.
- D. ***War and Conflict –***

1. Daniel predicts that there will be time when the Antichrist is allowed to make war on the Jewish people.

²¹"I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, (Daniel 7:21 NKJV)

²⁵He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time. (Daniel 7:25 NKJV)

2. In Leviticus we find that God will allow Israel to be temporarily defeated when Israel is under covenant discipline.

¹⁷I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you. (Leviticus 26:17 NKJV)

E. *Seven Times* –

1. In Daniel 9, Daniel receives the message that the 70 years of exile will not be enough to solve Israel's predicament and bring her salvation. Daniel was hoping that Israel's trouble was over, but instead was told that periods of 70 years will occur 7 times to bring about Israel's redemption.

²⁴“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. (Daniel 9:24 NKJV)

2. In Leviticus, we find the principle of 7 times being applied to the time of Israel's discipline.

¹⁸“And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. (Leviticus 26:18 NKJV)

²¹“Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins. (Leviticus 26:21 NKJV)

²⁴then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins. (Leviticus 26:24 NKJV)

²⁸then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. (Leviticus 26:28 NKJV)

F. *Desolation* –

1. One of the major themes in the book of Daniel is the Abomination of Desolation. Daniel emphasizes that this abomination must lead to desolation. The world desolation is best defined in the book of Daniel by its use in Daniel 9.

¹³Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, “How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?” (Daniel 8:13 NKJV)

²⁷Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.” (Daniel 9:27 NKJV)

³¹And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation. (Daniel 11:31 NKJV)

¹¹“And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of

desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. (Daniel 12:11 NKJV)

2. Jesus enforces Daniel's prediction of an abomination that brings desolation in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20). (This, of course, is yet another reason why we know that Daniel was not speaking of Antiochus because Antiochus' abomination did not lead to desolation as it is described in the book of Daniel.) A time of desolation is central in Daniel's prophecy and central in Jesus' thinking about the end-times.

¹⁵*“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), (Matthew 24:15 NKJV)*

¹⁴*“So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not” (let the reader understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (Mark 13:14 NKJV)*

²⁰*“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. (Luke 21:20 NKJV)*

3. Desolation is a biblical theme with a covenant basis. Leviticus 26 predicts 7 times that desolation will come and this is why Daniel and Jesus emphasize desolation when they speak of a final abomination.

²²*I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate. (Leviticus 26:22 NKJV)*

³¹*I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas. (Leviticus 26:31 NKJV)*

³²*I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. (Leviticus 26:32 NKJV)*

³³*I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. (Leviticus 26:33 NKJV)*

³⁴*Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest and enjoy its sabbaths. (Leviticus 26:34 NKJV)*

³⁵*As long as it lies desolate it shall rest— for the time it did not rest on your sabbaths when you dwelt in it. (Leviticus 26:35 NKJV)*

⁴³*The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; they will accept their guilt, because they despised My judgments and because their soul abhorred My statutes. (Leviticus 26:43 NKJV)*

- a. Daniel's abomination of desolation is the prophesied outworking of the negative part of the covenant. Jesus uses Daniel's language, not only to emphasize Daniel's prophecy, but also to emphasize the covenant context of the trouble.
- b. It is important to recognize these covenantal connections because they help us to better understand Daniel's prophecy. These are things that Daniel would have assumed, but are sometimes easy for us to miss.

G. *The Removal of the Sacrifice –*

1. Another primary prediction in the book of Daniel is that the sacrifice will be put to an end by the Antichrist. Daniel predicts this four times (Daniel 8:11; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).

¹³Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?" (Daniel 8:13 NKJV)

2. When we look back at Leviticus, we see the prediction that the desolation that comes will affect the sanctuary and bring an end to the sacrifice and offering. This is why the abomination in Daniel is always mentioned as bringing both desolation and an end to the sacrifice.

³¹I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas. (Leviticus 26:31 NKJV)

H. *The End of Human Strength –*

1. Daniel also gives a very sobering prediction that the trouble of the end times will not come to a conclusion until the power of the holy people is shattered. This is a sobering prediction aimed, not at the destruction of Israel, but at breaking down resistance to Jesus so that the nations call on Him for salvation – the very thing that Jesus' return depends on (Matthew 23:39).

⁷Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished. (Daniel 12:7 NKJV)

2. Once again, when we look to Leviticus we see that Leviticus 26:19 predicts that God will break the "pride of your power" and this is why Daniel 12:8 predicts that these events will not end until the power of the holy people is shattered. Again, the covenant is driving Daniel's prophecy.

¹⁹I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. (Leviticus 26:19 NKJV)

I. *Final Salvation –*

1. Though the book of Daniel predicts great trouble, it also predicts the salvation of the Jewish people at the end of a time of trouble.
¹“At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. (Daniel 12:1 NKJV)

2. Once again, we find in Leviticus 26 that, though trouble is predicted, God remains fully committed to Israel. Even in a time of judgment, He will refuse to break covenant with them, will remember His agreements with the patriarchs, and will deliver Israel. Once again, Daniel affirms what the covenant predicts. Once again we find that judgment is not ultimate – mercy is.
⁴⁴Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. ⁴⁵But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.’ ” (Leviticus 26:44–45 NKJV)

J. When we look at Daniel and Leviticus together we see that Daniel’s predictions are rooted in the covenant, but most of Daniel’s predictions are rooted in the negative aspects of the covenant. This gives us a lot of insight into the time of trouble that Daniel predicts. It will be a time when Israel is experiencing judgment related to her inability to keep the covenant.

1. While God’s judgment is just one of the reasons behind the time of trouble that Daniel predicts, it is important that we do not stop with recognizing the judgment that it is involved. It is important to consider why Israel is facing judgment, and what the outcome of that judgment is.
2. Ultimately Israel’s judgment is designed to bring her to Paul’s crisis point in Romans 7. Paul realized that he could never keep the law of God and he found his solution in the power of the Holy Spirit transforming him through the gospel. Israel’s time of trouble is because of judgment, but it is ultimately not only for judgment. It is ultimately for Israel’s redemption. It is designed to bring Israel to her salvation.
3. Salvation, and not judgment, is God’s ultimate purpose for Israel. We must recognize that so we can engage with God’s ultimate plan for Israel. Some only see Israel’s judgment, but that is only part of what the Scripture says. We must recognize that the ultimate end of that judgment is salvation.
4. If we do not see Israel’s salvation we face a risk of not laboring for her salvation when we see her in a season of judgment. Instead of seeing that season of judgment as the end, we are to labor with her in judgment knowing that her salvation is God’s designated end.
5. Without understanding the covenant context, there is a lot we miss in the book of Daniel that Daniel assumed as he wrote it down. We can see the greater context of what is happening and why it is happening. This allows us to engage for fully in God’s plan.

6. God’s discipline is not intended to point out how “bad” Israel is. His discipline highlights His love and mercy for Israel when He gives Israel undeserved mercy and favor by delivering Israel, not just as individuals, but as an entire nation. This is because Israel is a mirror that illustrates the human predicament. God illustrates the discipline that all men deserve and the mercy He loves to give through Israel’s story.
- K. Daniel is not only undergirded by the covenant made at Sinai, it also ultimately declares the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12. These covenant promises ultimately triumph over the covenant discipline of the covenant at Sinai. In the book of Daniel we can see the fulfillment of the three key promises made to Abraham that he would have righteous descendants, they would inherit a land, and that the nations would be blessed.
- ¹⁴Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:14 NKJV)*
- ²⁷Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.’ (Daniel 7:27 NKJV)*
- ²⁴“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city [i.e. the land], To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. (Daniel 9:24 NKJV)*
- L. Leviticus 26, and the rest of the covenants undergird the book of Daniel and form the interpretive grid for Daniel’s prophecies. They are the “why” behind the “what” of Daniel’s prophecies. Daniel is predicting the ultimate end of the vengeance of the covenant (Leviticus 26:25) – God’s commitment to the future of His people. This is why Isaiah points us back to the law and the writings as the interpretive grid for the prophetic word. True prophets prophecy out of the law and the testimony because the covenants are what steward the people to bring them to Jesus.
- ²⁰To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20 NKJV)*

VII. CONCLUSION

- A. The covenants of the Old Testament are often neglected, but they are incredibly important to understand. The covenants undergird the prophets and we cannot understand the biblical story without understanding them.
- B. The covenants not only undergird the prophets, they also explain Israel’s current situation among the nations. Through the lens of the covenants we can understand God’s present dealings with the nations.

- C. The covenants also help us to understand our own relationship with God and how He relates to us. God's dealings with Israel are intended to reveal how He deals with all of His people. Ultimately the story of God's covenants becomes, not only Israel's story, but also our story.