

## **The Church of the Servant King**

### **Prophecy Series (Proph4\_Introduction to the Covenants With Israel)**

Before we delve into the particulars of the next set of prophecies that arise in Scripture, it is essential that we discuss the two primary interpretive approaches that exist in regard to these prophecies. Essential to interpreting the prophecies embedded in God's covenant with Abraham which is first expressed in Genesis 12:1-3 (and which is expanded in many other passages) is an understanding of God's purpose in human history. We have dealt at length with this subject in prior lessons and the view that I have expressed aligns with and expands upon a dispensational theology. The other primary view of God's purpose in human history is expressed by "Covenant" theologians whose views are heavily influenced by the amillennial or perhaps post-millennial views of Augustine through John Calvin.<sup>1</sup> It is important to recognize that the system of theology known as "Covenant" theology does not derive its name from the eschatological covenants that exist in Scripture and that we will study in this series of lessons. Rather, "Covenant" theology derives its name from a series of theological or soteriological covenants that are never specifically identified in Scripture.

Within Covenant theology, all of the Biblical doctrines relating to redemption (soteriology), the company of the redeemed (ecclesiology), and the climax of God's redemptive program (eschatology) are interpreted in light of these theological "covenants." This approach to interpreting Scripture and God's purpose in human history was systematized through Reformation theology that arose during and after the Reformation. The more notable fathers of this movement are John Calvin and Martin Luther. The Westminster Confession of faith is perhaps its most significant creedal statement.<sup>2</sup> The threefold schema of Reformed or "Covenant" theology is perhaps best explained by Louis Berkhof (a Reformed theologian) in his *Systematic Theology*.<sup>3</sup>

- ❑ **Covenant of Works** – According to Reformed theology, this was an agreement made by God with Adam as the representative head of the human race, whereby he was placed on probation. Obedience would be rewarded with eternal life and disobedience would be punished with death.
- ❑ **Covenant of Redemption** – The agreement between the Father and the Son whereby the Father gave the Son as Head and redeemer of the elect and the Son volunteered to take the place of those whom the Father had given Him.
- ❑ **Covenant of Grace** – The agreement between the offended God and the offending, but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this provision which results in a life of faith and obedience.

As these "covenants" that are in essence tenets of Reformed thought illustrate, much of the information contained in Reformed (or "Covenant") theology is biblical. A person can certainly be saved as a result of the gospel proclaimed by many Reformed theologians and believers. However, when such a theology is imposed upon one's interpretation of passages that are eschatological in nature, many problems ensue.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent analysis of the influence of Augustine upon John Calvin (and ultimately Covenant theology and Calvinism), see Dave Hunt, *What Love is This?* (Sisters, Oregon: Loyal Publishing, 2002), 20-21, 45-56, 59-72.

<sup>2</sup> For an interesting analysis of this synod, see Hunt, 86-89.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 211-218; 262-301.

- ❑ An artificial unity is imposed upon the Scriptures which requires a redempto-centric theology – a theology that is virtually blind to certain distinctions due to a sole focus upon the subject of redemption.
- ❑ Related to the previous point is the tendency to spiritualize one's understanding of the Millennial kingdom and promises related thereto, e.g. the Abrahamic Covenant and passages that expand or allude to this covenant.<sup>4</sup>
- ❑ Also, there is a consequent blurring of distinction between Israel and the Church.

### **Categories of Scriptural Covenants With Israel**

There are two categories of Scriptural covenants with Israel. Some refer to these two categories as “Unconditional” and “Conditional.” I prefer the terms “Unilateral” and “Bilateral.”

- ❑ Conditional (Bilateral) – an agreement between God and man contingent upon the faithful execution of the agreement's provisions by both parties. The provisions of the Mosaic Law are an example.
- ❑ Unconditional (Unilateral) – an agreement that may contain conditions, but which ultimately will be fulfilled based upon God's faithfulness and sovereign design for human history. The enjoyment of covenant blessings are conditioned upon obedience, but the ultimate fulfillment is not. The Abrahamic Covenant is an example.

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<sup>4</sup> An example is found in my notes and teaching on Romans chaps. 9-11 in the series – “Soteriology: Predestination and Election.” See especially Romans 9:6-9 where Paul is teaching the principle that true Israel is not based upon genetic heritage, but true Israel is rooted in faith. Paul is clearly using the contrast between unbelieving Israel and believing Israel as an example to his audience in the context of his greater argument that God has the sovereign prerogative to set Israel aside temporarily (9:14-28; 11: 1-36) while using a group of believers (i.e. the Church) in which there is no distinction based upon the flesh, only a distinction based upon spiritual faith. As a general rule, the Reformed theologian interprets this passage (9:6-9) as an expansion of the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant to Gentiles.