

The Covenants of Promise – Eph 2:11-13

The Gospel Age of Hope - #3

Introduction – So far we have seen the definitive proclamation that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and that the story of the Bible, the plan of God from the beginning to the end of the Bible, is a story of Creation, Fall and Redemption of the world through Jesus Christ. God has structured this redemptive history around the covenants of promise, progressively manifesting His purposes while remaining unified in His promise to redeem a people for Himself.

Jew and Gentile in the Covenants of Promises (Eph 2:11-13) - Gentiles are all those who are not physical Jews or not ceremonially circumcised. Circumcision marked those who were of Abraham (Gen 17). Everyone else was (previous to Christ's coming) far from the covenants of promise and they were without hope (v12). Gentiles were considered aliens and strangers with regard to those promises. Verse 13 is critical. We were brought near, not to Christ, but by Christ, to those covenants of promise. Not only are we brought into the covenant, vv14-18 notes that peace is brought to the relationship between Jew and Gentile. This is because we are all sons of God (Jew and Gentile) only through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26). But what are these covenants of promise?

The Covenants of Promise – Covenants made with God were sovereignly imposed (God initiated, no negotiations) between God and the people He was addressing. They declared God to be their God (often with a declaration of liberty from foes) granting life, union and communion with God, and stipulating conditions (with attendant blessings and curses) for living in the covenant. Each of the following covenants is the development of a single covenant of redemption over His fallen people.

The Adamic Covenant (Gen 3:15) – Within the curses which God imposed for violating the first covenant, the foundation of our salvation and the Covenant of Grace is first attested – the Seed of the Woman would crush the head of the serpent.

The Noahic Covenant (Gen 9:1-17) – Renewing and expanding the covenant commands, God revealed more of his covenantal work with Noah and all of creation.

The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-4, Gen 15, 17) – From one of the descendants of Noah's son Shem, God chose Abraham to continue His covenantal work of redemption. God tells Abraham to go to a specific land and shows him that Abraham will fill that land with his descendants. In Gen 15, God goes through an elaborate ceremony declaring that He alone will uphold this covenant, and in Gen 17, God places His sign of circumcision upon Abraham and his male descendants. After Abraham, God renewed covenant with Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, and Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh.

The Mosaic Covenant (Ex 2:24, 6:1-8, 20:1-17) – The time of Moses did not bring about a separate dispensation; it was intimately related to the earlier covenants. It was because of those covenants that God brought Israel out of Egypt and renewed covenant with her again. Gal 3:19 makes clear that the Law did not replace the Abrahamic covenant; it was added alongside the promise. In addition, God now began to dwell with His people by means of the tabernacle.

The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:8-17, 23:5, Psalm 89:3) – Eventually God raised up David to be the king of Israel and to establish an everlasting kingdom, renewing the covenant again. Through David's son Solomon, the Temple was made where God would dwell with His people. But so much more was promised to David and through David's son.

The New Covenant (Jer 31:31) – The relationship of the New Covenant with the earlier covenants is contained in the very formula of the New Covenant, for it is made "with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." In addition, the first words in Matthew (1:1) point back to the covenants. These covenants were a connected whole so that Ezekiel would weave them together in God's promise for an ultimate fulfillment (Ezek 37:24-26).

The Covenants of Promise – There was continuity in the covenants even as they were renewed and developed. There was also continuity in the promises, and as the covenants were renewed, so the scope of the promises became more and more clear. God was going to save the world.

The Promise of a People – God told Abraham that through him all the covenant blessings would flow to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3), and "to all the nations of the earth" (Gen 26:4). We are told that this was the gospel preached to Abraham (Gal 3:8). Galatians also teaches that only those who are "in Christ" are heirs to this promise; there was no promise to Jews or Gentiles who are outside of Christ (Gal 3:29).

This language, however, does not begin to suggest a small smattering of this group and that group; it suggests the widest possible scope. The prophets echoed this scope over and over again (only a small sample: Is 54:2-5, 66:10,12, Zech 2:11, 8:22, Mal 1:11). These and other passages are not focusing on heaven; they are describing what God is going to do through His church in the power of the New Covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ which is why Jesus gives the Great Commission to us in this age (Matt 28:18-20).

The Promise of a Land – The initial land-promise had borders, but Abraham understood that as a token for a more glorious inheritance (Rom 4:13). The Seed of Abraham had been promised the nations (Psalm 2:7-8). The prophecies use rich imagery to describe the breadth (again, only a small sample: Psalm 72:8-9, 11, 19, Is 9:6-7, Dan 2:35).

The Promise of a Kingdom – Reigning, ruling, subduing, taking dominion, possessing the gates, producing, flowing, overflowing, sharing, streaming in, a growing thirst for the knowledge of God, reproducing to a thousand generations until the older covenants and times cannot even be recalled. This is the language of the prophets regarding the successful kingdom of God. But this will have to wait until another sermon.

There was a time when "you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." The covenants of promise always have been and remain the good news of Jesus Christ, Savior of the world.

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