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Section: Divine Covenants (Covenant Theology)

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**HANDOUT NOTES**

**Q58. What is the Old Covenant?**

The Old Covenant was a temporary covenant made primarily with Israelites and was defined by the Abrahamic Covenant, conditioned by the Mosaic Covenant, and focused by the Davidic Covenant. This covenant offered temporary blessings but did not offer eternal life. Through promises, types, and shadows, it taught about the Messiah, who was to come to fulfill the law, establish the New Covenant, and redeem the elect.

* **Introduction**

**Divine Covenant**:A relational agreement initiated by God that may include obligations, rewards, and/or punishments from Him.

* **The Davidic Covenant**
* **The history that gets us to the Davidic Covenant**

God told Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 17 that kings would come from them.

While the Israelite people ongoingly proved to be foolish and disobedient, God’s promises to Abraham held back the full curse of the covenant. Eventually, under Joshua and Caleb, Israel entered the land of Canaan, obtaining the promised land inheritance from God.

They were now in the land, but disobedient to the covenant so they were afflicted and oppressed. The laws of God were neglected, and for that the people suffered. There was not peace, prosperity, or unity; instead, as Scripture says, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (**Judges 17:6, 21:25**).

They needed a human king to rule them according to God’s law, but they weren’t seeking a king who would lead them according to God’s law.

They sinfully asked for a king who would “… be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (**1 Samuel 8:19-20**).

They wanted to be like the world; they wanted a king like the wicked nations had, and they thought living under that kind of reign was superior to living under God’s law. They longed to put off God’s reign and laws to conform to the ways of the world around them.

God permitted the Israelites what they demanded unto Saul being named the first king of Israel. But Saul’s rule was broken from the start and proved to be a failure over time.

In 1 Samuel 16, David is shown to be God’s chosen one for appointment to kingship. In the proceeding chapters of Scripture, we can read of David’s official appointment to the throne and success in driving out all of the enemies from the land, according to the sovereign hand of God.

* **The Davidic Covenant declared**

David speaks to the covenant that God made with him in 2 Samuel 23:5, and it is also specified as a covenant in Psalm 89:3. A significant text is 2 Samuel 7:1-17.

**2 Samuel 7:1-17** **1**Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, **2**the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” **3**And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.” **4**But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, **5**“Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? **6**I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. **7**In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’ **8**Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. **9**And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. **10**And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, **11**from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. **12**When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. **13**He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. **14**I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, **15**but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. **16**And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’” **17**In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

In the stablishing of this covenant, the earthy implications are that the earthly Davidic king was to reflect the righteous rule of the divine King, and the earthly king was to lead Israel in the faithful observance of the Old Covenant law.

The Abrahamic Covenant promised a specific land to a specific people for an earthly kingdom. The Mosaic Covenant provided the law of the kingdom. And now, the Davidic Covenant provides the human kings for the earthly kingdom—to rule the people of the Abrahamic Covenant according to the law of the Mosaic Covenant. All of this makes up the Old Covenant.

* **The covenant rewards/blessings**

The people of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants were the same, as was the offer of blessed earthy life in the land of Canaan. In the Davidic Covenant, we see God expand upon what the blessed life they would experience with Old Covenant obedience would be. In the 2 Samuel 7 passage, we find the offer of security and rest in the promised land for the people of the Old Covenant, and, better yet, that God would dwell with them—giving further special care and attention among them.

In summary, still at stake was the reward of Abraham’s line perpetually staying, living, and thriving in the promised land with the blessed presence of God.

* **“A” covenant of works**

In the Davidic Covenant, God gave promises to David and his descendants, and God obligated them to obey the laws of the Old Covenant. In the covenant, God threatened discipline and punishment for covenant breaking.

**1 Kings 8:25-26**25 “Now therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father what you have promised him, *saying*, ‘You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.’ 26Now therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you have spoken to your servant David my father.”

**Psalm 132:11-12**11The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. 12If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them,  
*their sons also forever* shall sit on your throne.”

David and his sons must keep the terms of the covenant—they must obey God’s law. If they do, they will perpetually thrive and have an earthy throne to rule from; if they do not, they will be disciplined, even punished.

In the Davidic Covenant, if Abraham’s line keeps the Mosaic Covenant, they enjoy the rewards/blessings of the Old Covenant—but if they disobey, the receive the Old Covenant curses.

What we have here, as David understood and Solomon interpreted correctly as well, is a covenant of works.

They had to obey *correctly and perpetually* to *fully and continually* enjoy the covenant benefits.

* **The Old Covenant was focused by the Davidic Covenant**

The Davidic Covenant establishes David and his sons (the heirs of his throne) as a kind of federal headship in the kingdom. This is one way the Old Covenant was focused by the Davidic Covenant.

The Davidic king was particularly tasked to construct the dwelling place of the Lord (the temple) and guard it. He was required to know, obey, and uphold for the people of the covenant all of God’s Old Covenant law (male circumcision and the other positive laws and the eternal moral law). And the Davidic king was to lead the people well according to his role of God-appointed ruler of the promised land.

* + **One Old Covenant made up of three covenants**

**Samuel Renihan**: “With the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants put together we can clearly see the kingdom of Israel in full ...”

**Samuel Renihan**: “The Mosaic and Davidic Covenants do not extend any further than the initial scope set down in the Abrahamic Covenant. In order to enjoy a blessed life in Canaan, God's covenant must be kept. This is why the Old Covenant includes the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants. Moses controls Abraham and David. The Mosaic Covenant is the most prominent covenant in the Old Testament because it controls whether you enjoy Abraham's covenant and it stands over the Davidic kings who must copy and keep the law. It is impossible to refer only to the Mosaic Covenant when speaking of the Old Covenant because it unavoidably brings along with it the two other covenants that it controls.”

The three Old Covenant covenants ultimately all have the same parties, rules, rewards, and penalties.

* + **The Messiah to come specifically from David’s line**

The most important thing about the Davidic Covenant is how it focuses the Old Covenant in regard to it serving to bring about the Covenant of Redemption Messiah promised to Abraham (and even before in Genesis 3:15). It would be through the line of the Davidic king that God’s promise of blessing to the nations would be accomplished. When God said to David **in 2 Samuel 7:16**, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure before me forever," He ultimately had in view a house and a kingdom much greater than that of ethnic Israel—there was a spiritual promise repeated to the Davidic line. God was declaring that the Messiah would come specifically from David’s line, and this Messiah would be the better and final King—a forever King over a diverse people from all nations. This is the most significant way the Old Covenant was focused by the Davidic Covenant.

All of creation is set in the context of God’s eternal plan. God shows in this Davidic Covenant that it is through David’s line that He will see through the Genesis 3/Abraham spiritual promises for the before time plan—decree—trinitarian covenant. All of this is happening to bring about and show how we get to the chosen One who establishes The Covenant of Grace—the New Covenant.

* **God did what He promised: Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham**

**Matthew 1:1** The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

The plan to bring about the Messiah through Abraham’s family line was done as promised. The Old Covenant’s purpose of stepping the story towards The Covenant of Grace—the New Covenant—has worked.

**Acts 13:16-23 16**So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

“Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. **17**The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. **18**And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. **19**And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. **20**All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. **21**Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. **22**And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ **23**Of this man's [David’s] offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.”

God did what He decreed to do and what He has been promising all along: Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, the seed of the woman promised in Genesis 3:15.

* **Promises, Types, and Shadows Taught About the Messiah**

We’ve discussed **promises** that stretched beyond the Old Covenant, such as the promise to Abraham about his Offspring and the promise to David about his Offspring. Abraham was promised a real physical line; but more importantly, he was promised the Messiah would come from his line. David was promised a real physical line of kings; but more importantly, he was promised the King of kings would come from him. So, we have promise realties that are of eternal importance and stretch past the Old Covenant for the benefit of the eternally chosen ones of God. These were not covenant benefits they had to earn; rather, these promises were planned realities God was certain to see through.

There were **shadows** in Old Covenant. Shadows are things that dimly show something else—something in anticipation--such as the places the priests ministered in were shadows of heavenly places, and the things the priests ministered were shadows of the spiritual things of Christ. And we’re told in **Hebrews 10:1** that, “the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities.” The Old Covenant law foreshadowed—it dimly represented—the goodness, purity, and holiness of Christ and the work He would accomplish for true eternal redemption of the people He came to save.

There are **types** in Old Covenant. Types are not the antitype, but a picture of the antitype. The Old Covenant was a typological covenant with typological people for typological life and typological blessing in the typological promised land of Canaan.

There are many examples of Old Covenant types—the types of this type-antitype dynamic are all throughout in the Old Covenant. In the Old Testament, Christ is taught about in large part through types—though in mystery form, He is certainly revealed through types. Christ, His work, and His blessings where a mystery—a shadow—in the Old Covenant. Yet, He was declared sufficiently, whereby all who saw the truth of and put their trust in the coming Messiah were saved eternally—not by the Old Covenant, but by the person and work of the New Covenant to come, who was promised by God and foreshowed in the Old Testament.

* **God Gave Ethnic Israel Earthy Benefits**

God did in fact give ethnic Israel the Promised Land and other benefits of the Old Covenant.

**Joshua 21:43-45 43**Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. **44**And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. **45**Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

**1 Kings 4:20** Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy.

See in our study that God gave ethnic Israel land, rest and protection, kings, and multiplied them greatly.

For a time, they had rest on every side and enjoyed the blessing of being God’s covenant people. They multiplied and had earthly prosperity on the physical promised land.

Promises God made to Abraham and the others in the Old Covenant were kept and realized to the fullest extent when God caused the Davidic people to defeat all of Israel’s enemies, and God dwelt in their midst in Solomon’s temple.

In this, God displayed His goodness as He gave earthy benefits. This is very significant. We must not disregard this reality. Earthly promises God made were kept, and Abraham’s line experienced great, great blessings according to the plan of God.

* **Ethnic Israel Broke the Covenant**

As we have stated, *to have or remain in the benefits of the Old Covenant, those of Abraham’s line had to remain in obedience and submission to the terms of the covenant*.

**1 Kings 9:6-8 6”**… if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, **7**then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. **8**And this house will become a heap of ruins …”

In order to maintain in the covenantal blessings and gifts, the covenant people needed to *correctly and perpetually* obey the terms of the covenant. They needed to keep the law *ongoingly*. Once in the promised land, the extent to which they kept the law would be the extent to which they earned their stay in the promised land.

To their demise, Abraham’s line repeated in disobedience and covenant failure over and over. The covenant people fell terribly short of living according to the requirements of the Old Covenant.

God issued serious rebukes and hard words towards them.

**Amos 5:12 “**For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins …”

**Jeremiah 2:19 “**Your evil will chastise you, and your apostasy will reprove you. Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God; the fear of me is not in you, declares the Lord God of hosts.”

**Hosea 9:1**Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the whore, forsaking your God.

In the testimony of Scripture, we can see clearly that the people of the Old Covenant were not faithful to the covenant that they were in with God. They broke the covenant, and that meant they had no right to any of the works-based rewards offered in the covenant.

The most important thing God gave as a blessing to them was that He always sought to find a people in the Old Covenant whom He would not cut off in order to preserve the ethnic line until Christ came. This is critical, since this was the people through whom He chose to bring the Messiah. Prior to the arrival of Christ, God maintained the Old Covenant, and ethnic Israel was not crushed to the point of nonexistence. Many threats came against them, many did get cut off by God, but God always preserved a remnant.

* **The** **Old Covenant People Were Eventually Fully and Finally Cursed**

Their work—their choices—their sin—*earned* the payment of curses.

**2 Kings 17:20** … the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had cast them out of his sight.

**Jeremiah 3:8** “for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce …”

**2 Kings 23:27**And the Lord said, “I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.”

God would not remain with them in Old Covenant relationship. In His timing, He would cut them off and abolish the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant began to fade away in Old Testament times, until eventually, many years later, it was abolished altogether. That occurred after Christ came.

In the first century, after the promises about the Messiah were fulfilled (His arrival, His work, His ascension, etc), the full curse of the Mosaic covenant was also poured out upon Judah as well, and the Old Covenant was done away with.

Because the Old Covenant is abolished, being of *ethnic* descent from Israel no longer, *in and of itself*, means anything unique *in relation* to God and covenant with God.

* + **Dispensationalism: A broken system with wrong hermeneutics**

This modern belief of Dispensationalism misses or denies much of what we have seen here. Dispensationalism seeks to interpret Scripture differently than the historic Christian confessions on some of these things, and that is driven by or produces a conclusion of the thinking that ethnic Israel *remains* special and is separate from non-Israelite believers.

* + **There are no longer any special national groups or lands**

**1 Kings 9:6-8 6**… “if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, **7**then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. **8**And this house will become a heap of ruins …”

We see clearly in Scripture that Abraham’s line repeated in disobedience and covenant failure over and over, so God ended the covenant relationship (Hebrews 8:9 & 13). Therefore, because the Old Covenant has been abolished, being of ethnic descent from Israel no longer, in and of itself, means anything unique in relation to God, covenant with God, or special benefits.

Horizontally, the nation of/the people of ethnic Israel should be loved and treated in the same way we would any other nation or people group. Ethnic Israelites are not more or less important than anyone else in the world. It is not more biblical to elevate ethnic/national Israel in New Covenant times. To do so is a misunderstanding of covenant, biblical realties.

Abraham’s line has no special or remaining covenantal claim to any earthly land, or any other covenant blessing that was offered in the Old Covenant.

Abraham’s line did not earn the right to stay in the land of Canaan, so a cruse of the covenant was such that they no longer have a covenantal claim to Canaan or any other land.

What once was called “holy land” was *made common* by the abolishment of the Old Covenant and the formal establishment of the New Covenant, *worldwide* reign of Christ.

The true spiritual people of God—the elect—have a glorious *eternal land* (the *antitypical* “holy land”) awaiting us. It is not the land of Canaan on this broken earth.

Therefore, on this first creation, there are no longer any special lands or national groups.

* **God never fails**

In all of this talk of Old Covenant failure, let us note that the disobedience of the Old Covenant people was not God failing. No, the broken covenant was actually a part of His perfect, preordained plan to display the need for and to take us to the Messiah and the New Covenant.

* **Prophetic Idiom**

In the Old Testament books of Prophecy, God promises several times in a variety of different ways that He had yet to complete a mighty work for “Israel.”

Since God used ethnic Israel as a shadow of His eternal chosen ones, *sometimes* the way He speaks to or about “Israel” in the Old Testament is not about ethnic Israel, but for/about *spiritual Israel*—the true eternal people of God. In many passages, typological language and Prophetic Idiom is used.

**Prophetic Idiom**: A form of speech in prophecy whereby *familiar names, terms, things, and concepts are used to speak of something else* (something antitypical, and in some cases, something still to come).

With this clarity, one is better suited to make correct interpretations of prophetic Scripture. For example, what God is declaring in the passage below is not a promise to ethnic Israel as a whole; rather, it is a reality for antitypical Israel—the eternal people of God made up of people from all nations:

**Ezekiel 36:22, 25-27 22**“Therefore say to the house of Israel ... **25**I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26**And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27**And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

This glorious truth about regeneration/redemption/salvation is a New Covenant benefit only for those chosen in the Covenant of Redemption. In passages like these, we must see that God is using the title of Israel to teach about the antitypical, eternal people of God. And, in addition to some metaphoric language, God uses prophetic idiom—familiar things and concepts to speak of something better and different than that which the original audience naturally knew.

* **Only One Way to Be Saved**

As we complete our main consideration of the Old Covenant, we need to stress again how a person in any time of human history can be redeemed. As I hope you see so clearly by now, there is one answer to this, which is based on the Covenant of Redemption, because of an unchangeable God, because of an unbreakable eternal promise. Salvation has always been by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

In our time after Jesus’ death, we look back to the finished work of Jesus for salvation. But before Jesus came, they looked forward to the person and work of Jesus for salvation. Same Jesus, same one way to salvation. There has never been any other way. The New Covenant worked in time and space even before it was formally established.

**1689 Christian Confession of Faith:** “God was pleased to proclaim the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect and producing in them faith and repentance. In this promise the gospel in its substance was revealed and made effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.”

**1689 Confession of Christian Faith:** “The price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ till after his incarnation. Yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefit of it was imparted to the elect in every age since the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices that revealed him and pointed to him as the seed that would bruise the serpent’s head and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He is the same yesterday and today and forever.”