

# Our Covenant-Keeping God

## Part One

I'd like to talk to you tonight about Covenants, something I doubt many of us think about too often! What are covenants? How do they work? Do they affect the way God works? Do covenants affect us? If so, how?

In particular, the question I would like to answer in the two messages is: How does the old covenant and the new covenant fit into the Abrahamic Covenant? And where does the Church fit into all of this, if it even does?

Honestly, I have had some confusion about that last question for the past 2 decades; and I have wondered if others have had the same confusion. So I'd like to address these things in my two messages this year.

Here are some of the things that I know about covenants:

- The Abrahamic Covenant was established on the basis of faith, and came *before* the Law.
- That Law (aka the Mosaic Covenant, the First Covenant, the Old Covenant) was given at Mt. Sinai through Moses to Abraham's physical descendants, and was in effect until the moment of Christ's death.
- The New Covenant, inaugurated at the moment of Christ's death, was to replace the Old, but has yet to be established (and even now it has not yet been established).
- Both the Old and the New Covenants have been/will yet be made with Israel, *not with the Church!*

My confusion has been right there in that last bullet point! The "...not with the Church" part. Really -- even the New Covenant? I have come to learn that YES! Even the New Covenant is not made with the Church! So my question was: Then where does the Church fit in to the whole picture of the Covenants?

In order to begin to understand this, we have to have a good grasp of the promises of God embodied in the covenant God made with Abraham. Perhaps the Abrahamic Covenant could be pictured like an umbrella covenant (if I can say it like that), *under which* the Old and the New fit. And, as we will see, the Abrahamic Covenant is something that *does* have to do with us! We have access to the promises God made to Abraham through his Seed – Jesus Christ. In fact, those promises become the very warp and weft of the fabric that makes up our hope! Let's read about it in this passage: **Hebrews 6:13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU, AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." ... ..17 In the same way God,**

**desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18 in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast...**

These promises are on offer to us as the spiritual descendants of Abraham through faith in his Seed, Jesus Christ! This hope is a refuge for us even today amidst the tumultuous world in which we live. This hope set before us is the anchor of our very soul; a hope sure and steadfast. Even today we can have strong encouragement because this hope is based on our Covenant-keeping God. Yes, our God keeps His covenant. **Numbers 23:19 "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent [change His mind]; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"**

Even though these promises were made 4,000 years ago, and even though those promises were based on God's plans and purposes set out at the very beginning 6,000 years ago in the Garden of Eden, we can KNOW that God is going to bring to pass that which He determined at the beginning. We can know that He *is* on a time-schedule, and that we are part of that time-schedule! God is not late; His plan has not been thwarted, nor altered in the least. God wants us to remember, and in remembering He wants us to know that He will complete all of what He set out to do. **Isaiah 46:9 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'.**

God declared the end...from the beginning. The first part of this Bible tells the last part, and the last tells the first. We can recognize that in the Book of the Revelation. This book is the last, it *culminates* God's Word. All is fulfilled therein! We read in **Revelation 19:10b ...For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" ... 13b...and His name is called The Word of God**. The phrase --"the *testimony* of Jesus" -- refers to all that is said about Jesus in the *entire* scope of God's Word from the writings of Moses all the way through to the writing of John in this last book. And since His *name is called the Word of God*, the whole Bible is the testimony spoken of Jesus from start to finish. And since that is true, then the Bible -- in its entirety -- is the "spirit of prophecy." The *entire* Word of God is about prophecy and is fulfilled in Jesus!

It was also the Apostle John who also wrote these words: **John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.** And a few verses past this: **...14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth** -- speaking of the only begotten Son of God -- God in the Person of Son.

The point is this: Everything spoken in the Word of God is fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. Everything. And since that is true, then can we realize that the giving of Prophecy began in the

Garden *at the very beginning*? Remember, God told the end in the telling of the beginning. And if we miss that point, then we would miss the correct understanding of prophecy, because the foundation of prophecy is given at the very beginning. (As we will see in a few minutes, the 7 days at the beginning, actually lay out the whole prophetic timeline!)

In his second letter, Peter teaches us how we are to understand prophecy. **II Peter 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.** Peter reveals here that prophecy (which is the complete testimony of Jesus) is not a matter of one's own interpretation! Can we accept the fact then that we are not supposed to *interpret* the Word of God! Instead, we are to strive to *understand* the Word -- through diligent study of the Scriptures, through the diligent study of the One Whose name is the Word of God. We are to strive to understand what the men wrote, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as they spoke from God. We are to compare Scripture with Scripture, studying it the way God gave it, *line upon line, precept upon precept, a little from here and a little from there*, starting at the beginning in order to lay the proper foundation and building from there. We are to understand that the things written in God's Word are *spiritual thoughts, put into spiritual words*, which can only be understood by the Spirit of God. **I Corinthians 2:10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God...**

So let's do a brief review of the things told at the beginning, so as lay the correct foundation for understanding prophecy, and by doing this we will come to a proper understanding of the question concerning the Church and the covenants. We must remember that in foundation *God's created purpose for man was that he would rule over the earth in the stead of Satan* (Gen. 1:2; cf. Ezek. 28:18; Gen. 1:26-28). Most of us know that when God created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1, He created them *perfectly*. But Genesis 1:2 describes a chaotic earth that was utterly without form and was totally void; in fact raging waters covered the earth and darkness covered the raging waters. Subsequent commentary can be found in Isaiah's writings in which the prophet explicitly stated that God did not *create* the earth formless (a waste place [Isa. 45:18]). In comparing Scriptures, we know that the earth had fallen into this chaotic, ruined state through Lucifer's ancient rebellion. So in Genesis 1:3-31 God began a 6 day restorative process, creating man on the 6<sup>th</sup> day for the purpose of ruling over the earth. Then we are told in Genesis 2:1-3 that God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. We can visualize the time-line of those 7 days like this:

(Board Work)

This time-line is fairly simple, isn't it? But the simplicity of those 34 verses in no way reflects the grandeur of what God is telling us. The pattern God would use to bring restoration out of the ruin of something which had been created perfectly had been set. He would use 6 days to restore a ruined creation, and He would rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

In the original restorative process, near the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> day, God took the dust of the earth, and gathered it together in order to form the body of the man. And since it was *not good for the man to be alone*, God took a part of the man's body, and from that part, He formed his wife, so that the two could rule together as one over the restored creation. God's stated purpose in creating man was that they would rule over the earth in Satan's stead. But we know that nearly immediately after the Man and the Woman were created perfectly, they themselves fell into ruin, disqualifying themselves for the position of rulership. Of course, this did not take God by surprise! His plan for redemption had been established from before the foundation of the world. God would offer redemption so that mankind could be placed back in the position wherein they could fulfill their created purpose. In this we can see that *God's purpose for creating man and His purpose for redeeming man is one and the same purpose*. If God created man to rule (and He did), and sin disqualified man from being able to rule (and it did), then wouldn't it make sense that redemption (redeeming man out of sin) would be for the singular purpose of allowing man to fulfill his created position? Salvation is ultimately for the purpose of man ruling.

But how would God restore mankind; and what steps would He take to do this? The pattern had been set! There would be another 6 days of restorative work and another 7<sup>th</sup> day of rest. Only this time the period covered in a "day" would be a thousand years. (And I'll mention this so as to let you know that we have not lost our focus: Covenants come into play in this 7 day period. We will yet see how it all works together with respect to the covenants.)

Seeing this 6 day period with a 7<sup>th</sup> day of rest as becoming God's prophetic timeline is *not* just my opinion! Neither is it merely the opinion of anyone who teaches this. Nor should it be anyone's opinion to *disagree* that this is God's prophetic timeline. Remember, prophecy not up to anyone's own interpretation! Scriptural prophecy has never been an act of human will (nor could it be), but rather prophecy is given by the men who have been carried along by the Holy Spirit as they spoke what God wanted them to speak. *All Scripture is inspired by God* and is profitable for His people! And so what God lays out in the historical details at the beginning reveals what will be prophecy fulfilled in the end.

But can we know for certain that this was what God intended His people to understand about prophecy? Can we know for certain that this basic timeline really lays out prophecy? Again, we go to Peter's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter! There is something he says about mockers in the last days, with respect to prophecy, specifically prophecy concerning the Coming of the Lord. **II Peter 3:3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying,** [be sure to notice their comment that follows the question they ask – not just the question] **"Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."** 5 **For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which the world at that**

**time was destroyed being flooded with water. 7 But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**

Peter (who had just explained about *how* prophecy was given) tells us what the mockers will mock in the last days. People (pastors, bible teachers and Christians in general) within the Church-at-large – who *are confronted with the veracity of this prophetic timeline* -- will mock something that is very important to understand if someone is going to correctly understand prophecy (which he just previously said in this same letter that it's not up to man's interpretation!). They will mock the teaching concerning the earth being created perfectly in an age past, and that it fell into a ruin in an age past due to Lucifer's rebellion, and that the six days of work recorded in Genesis were 6 days of restorative work which now represents 6 one thousand-year days of a subsequent restorative work with respect to man (who was also created perfectly and fell into a ruin). They will mock that the 7<sup>th</sup> day of rest recorded in Gen 2:1-3 represents the veracity and timing of the future Day of the Lord, the Sabbath Rest that is yet for the people of God, which is exactly when the Lord is going to return to set up His kingdom. Where is the promise of His coming? Right there! The 7<sup>th</sup> day! Yet, "good Christian people" will mock this very thing, regardless of what the truth of Scripture is!

And as if vv. 3-7 were not clear enough, the verse that follows makes it even clearer still! **II Peter 3:8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day**. In fact, the grammar used in the Greek here is really saying: "Stop letting this fact escape your notice – the fact that one day is a thousand years... because it is escaping your notice!" And then, to draw all of this together, and in order to show that Peter also deals with the *timing* of Christ's return, he writes: **9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.** God, through the pen of Peter, is speaking of Christians perishing; speaking of Christians losing their life in the Coming Age because they did not lay it down in the present age; speaking of Christians who are not paying attention to that which God is calling their attention! That is why *He is not slow about the promise of His coming* – He wants us to repent!!! Jesus is not going to return a moment earlier than what He can because He is patient! But He is also not going to wait a moment longer than what is necessary, because the *exact* moment of His return has been set, and will not be changed, having been determined from before the world began, but revealed at the restoration of the earth through the 7<sup>th</sup> day when God rested from all His work back in Genesis 2. He is not slow about fulfilling His promise; the timing of His return has already been established!

Then Peter goes on to explain how the Day of the Lord *will begin* and how it *will end*. **10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief** [revealing to us how the thousand-year day will begin, and now reveals how the thousand-year day will end], **in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.** So where is the promise of His coming? It's right there! At the close of the 6<sup>th</sup> day, the dawn of the 7<sup>th</sup>. But even with all of this information, do you know why Jesus will come as a thief in the night, at a time most Christians will not expect? It is because

most Christians will have bought into how man interprets prophecy, instead of striving to understand how God gives it. They will not allow it to be given line upon line, precept upon precept the way God gave it, and they will even mock that which God laid out at the beginning, not allowing the Spirit of God to lay it out through the writings of the holy men who spoke from God.

So let's look at a visual representation of a day being as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day! Using this basic timeline, laid out at the beginning, and given what Peter says, this is the way we can lay it out, knowing that we are very near the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> day, the 6<sup>th</sup> thousandth year.

(Board Work)

The first 2,000 years between Adam and Abraham takes up the space of eleven chapters in Genesis. The following 1,993 years take up the space of the remaining OT from Genesis 12- Malachi 4, which may lead us to conclude that the recorded events in those first eleven chapters are much less significant than all details recorded in the remaining OT, but we would be wrong in that conclusion. The fact that so little space is given for the first 2,000 years should drive us to understand that *much* weight is attributed to each and every bit of the information recorded in those first eleven chapters, and that the Spirit of God chose very specific details of the events recorded to which we would do well to pay attention, close attention! But, we will have to leave that to another time! Right now, and for the remainder of this first message, we will concentrate on the 2,000 years of the Dispensation of the Jews. It is a 2,000 year dispensation, but thus far only 1993 years have been spent. The remaining 7 years will resume at the future signing of the peace treaty that most in Israel will make with the Antichrist. But this again is a teaching for another time.

### **The Call of Abraham**

The promises given to Abraham, the covenant God made with Abraham, and the oath He swore to Abraham is something of utmost importance in understanding how prophecy will play out. Without this in place, any individual would lack the basis wherein he could go onto spiritual maturity. God lays the foundation to the promises He gave to Abram in **Genesis 12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from**

**your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** From this point, God progressively revealed more about the promises in Genesis chapters 13-22.

- In Genesis 13, God promised to give the land that He had only previously shown him; promising the land to Abram and to his descendants forever, also promising that his descendants would be *as the dust on the earth*.
- In Genesis 14, after a war with kings, Abram met Melchizedek, and learned he would have blessings in the heavens and on the earth. (I wonder if it is here where Abraham learned about the heavenly city, but of course there is no record of *when* he learned of it – only that he learned of it, so it will have to remain a question for us.)
- In Genesis 15, God promised that his descendants would be innumerable, even *as the stars in the heavens*, and it is here God made a covenant with Abram, giving him the exact location and extent of the earthly land (vv.18-21).
- In Genesis 17, God changed his name from Abram (meaning honored father) to Abraham (meaning father of a multitude), promising to make Abraham exceedingly fruitful and that kings would come from him. It is here that God gave Abraham the sign of the covenant – circumcision. Remember, signs are for the Jew, and point to something beyond itself, something yet future. So in making a covenant with Abraham and in giving circumcision as the sign of this covenant, God was indicating that the circumcision of the flesh of the foreskin of all the male children born to Abraham and his descendants would point to the future time when, through Christ, individuals could receive circumcision made without hands, one that is the removal of the body of flesh (Col. 2:11). And then finally,
- In Genesis 22, after God had given Abraham all the promises and Abraham believed it all, God tested him. **Genesis 22:2 And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."** Abraham immediately obeyed, making arrangements to leave the next morning, then walked a three day journey to the place, and bound his son and laid him on the altar and raised the knife! No questions asked. We know that God stayed the hand of Abraham, and gave a ram as a substitute for the sacrifice. Once the offering was made, God spoke to him yet a second time, making His oath: **Genesis 22:15 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."**

So there we have it. Essentially, the promises made to Abraham are as follows:

- Abraham will be blessed, and through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed
- He will be the father of a great nation and the father of many nations
- He and his descendants will possess a land as an inheritance
- His descendants will be as the dust of the ground, the stars of the heaven, the sand on the seashore.
- Kings will come from him (portending rulership in that land)

Now, there is something *very* important to note concerning Abraham's descendants -- *the stars in the heaven* and *the sand on the seashore*. This reveals that he will have descendants in two realms -- he descendants will be in the heavens *and* on the earth. Of course we know that his descendants as *the sand on the seashore* are his physical descendants through Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's 12 sons, the Twelve Tribes of Israel. And through later revelation, it becomes evident that the descendants as *the stars in the heaven* are spiritual descendants through the Seed of Abraham, Who is Christ.

And not only this, but also Abraham's descendants in both realms will possess a land -- earthly and heavenly, *and* descendants in both realms will have ascendancy over their enemies respectively -- both *will possess the gate of their enemies*.

From this point forward, God will only work through the covenant that He made with Abraham. It will only be through this covenant that, in the end, God will have established His plans and purposes, and will have accomplished all His good pleasure. Everything that is to be done will be done through the outworking of the Abrahamic covenant. And both the Mosaic covenant, as well as the New Covenant, will be inaugurated and established within the confines of the promises God made to Abraham and to his physical descendants.

As we close this first message, I would like to say something about the time in which we presently live (and this will be the springboard for the jumping off point for the second message). Oh! We live at an interesting point on this timeline, don't we? The time in which we presently live is literally between the *inauguration* of the New Covenant (which took place the moment Christ died) and its establishment. Israel refused to repent from their rebellious ways, and God has fully set her aside, but just for a time. And so the New Covenant, though inaugurated at the cross, has not yet been established.

It is during this time that the Holy Spirit is searching a Bride for the Son. Here we are nearing the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> thousandth-year day. It will be at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> thousand-year day that God will gather *the dust of the earth* yet once again (i.e. the spiritual descendants of Abraham) via the resurrection/rapture of the Church and form the Body of the Son of Man. And since it *would not be good for the Son of Man to be alone* (the type/antitype structure of Scripture comes into play here), God will remove a part of the Son's Body and will form a wife for the Son, so that the Two could rule together as One over the restored creation. It's an amazing picture, isn't it? All of it seen in the foundation laid out at the very beginning! The end really is told at the beginning, isn't it?

Then once the Bride is established for the Son, then the Father will turn His attention back to the *sand which is on the seashore*, and will deal with His adulterous wife, Israel, again. After the final 7 years of the previous dispensation runs its course, His wife will repent and will be reestablished. Then, the New Covenant (which was inaugurated *at least* 2,007 years prior) will be established on the earth, and Israel, as the Wife of God will possess the land of her inheritance in full and will possess the gate of their enemies.

We will look at that more closely in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the message.