

Theology

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Seminar: **COMMENTARY ON R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM (5)**

3:8. *The first Noachic covenant (Genesis 6:17-19) was particular and an administration of the covenant of grace. 9. The second Noachic covenant (Genesis 9:8-17) was a universal non-soteric covenant promising the restraint of judgement until the last day.*

It is by no means clear that the “first” covenant quoted here is not just a prediction of the coming covenant of chapter 9. Whether this is so or not, the announcement of 6:17 looks more like a declaration of what is to come, a prediction, than a separate “covenant.” In chapter 9, are the new provisions of animal food (with the blood forbidden), plus the death penalty in verses 1-7, part of the conditions of the covenant definitely announced in 8-17 (“now I myself do establish”) ? Why should we assume every mere *circumstance* of the new era after the flood was “part of” the covenant ?

The important thing here is that the Noachic Covenant is *the first covenant between God and man that God himself thought to identify as such*. The Hebrew word *berith* occurs eight times throughout the account of the flood year, first occurring in 6:17. Although key promises were made and animal sacrifices implied (as in Gen 3:15, and verse 21 with 4:4), Scripture is silent on any previous covenants, including what others might have been made with such righteous people as Enoch during the period from the expulsion from Eden to the flood, during over 1000 years. Theologians should not base important structural ideas on dubious and unnecessary human “inferences.” Thus we have no idea why God “took” Enoch, but endless speculations have filled the gaps in revelation (see the Jewish tradition about Enoch, and even more about Melchisedec). Still, despite the silence of Scripture at those points where our curiosity is strongest (!!), we do know that much of the vast culture and technology of the pre-flood age must have continued afterwards in the minds of those eight survivors. The mere building of such an Ark presupposes a high level of technological attainment. God cares about culture, and the doctrine of the Kingdom of God secures the fact of the eventual redemption of both earth (*Ha 'aretz*, or *Gē*.) and city (*Ēer* or *polis*) in the coming Kingdom promises.

The Noachic Covenant is an unconditional “common-grace” covenant, its broad provisions guaranteeing the continuity of the human race by sovereign promise, in the face of impending just judgement. It guarantees the salvation of nobody (it’s “non-soteric”), but nevertheless provides essential conditions for the future salvation of the Elect, of which the Ark and its contents becomes a typological figure referred to as such in the NT. It is the first unconditional covenant, in which the fulfillment of the provisions and promises rests solely on the sovereign power of God, and to which men contribute nothing. If it be argued that we contribute the empty hand of faith (and Arminians are not the only ones to claim this), the Reformed answer is that God himself supplies that motion of the soul as a fruit of regeneration. Saving faith is not the product of an independent autonomous soul. We come then, to the Abrahamic Covenant, and an important paradigm.

10. *The Abrahamic covenant is a renewal of the postlapsarian covenant/promise made to Adam (Genesis 3:15,17).*

But this could only be true if the terms *promise* (undeniable) and *covenant* (speculative) are effectively synonyms, which is clearly not the case. It also assumes

Heinrich Bullinger's "one and eternal covenant" (now) "of grace." It is clearly the case that the Abrahamic Covenant presupposes the promises of the seed of the woman to come. But that fact doesn't imply or somehow require a previous covenant, unless we just conflate the two terms, which Covenantalists do often enough. This new covenant (Gen 12:1-3, plus 15:1 and 8-21, and 17:1-14) follows a command to Abra[h]am to leave his land for the "promised land" of Canaan. God tells him that after a period of enslavement in Egypt for 400 years, he and his multitudinous seed are to inherit this Land forever. God defines its area and limits, identifies its current inhabitants, and warns that sanctions will fall upon those who "curse" Abraham, or the seed in his loins. This may be read as a divine proscription against anti-Semitism. In fact, universal blessing will come from Abraham to the nations as a whole, especially to those nations that bless Abraham, and by implication, his descendants. This may be read as an encouragement to Gentiles to treat God's people with respect (contrast Hitler' hatred with Oliver Cromwell, who invited the Jews back to England after centuries of exclusion).

In Gen 17:12 *fol.*, *circumcision* of all the *male* descendants is required as the sign and seal of this covenant *with a physical seed*. Both the Land promises and the calling of the Seed of the Woman of Gen 3:15 however, is said to flow through Isaac to his descendants rather than to Ishmael (*Cf.* Acts 3:25, Gal 3:16-18 and Gen 17:8). Paul's *midrash* on this is given in Galatians 4:21-31. In Romans 9-11 Paul also explains that within this physical seed is a "remnant seed" of true believers who have the same faith as Abraham, but more of that later. For now, it must be insisted that the Abrahamic Covenant is made with a literal physical man and his literal physical descendants, under the promise of a physical Land. This theme of a *People* in their *Land* is massively expanded in later prophecy, but never set aside or allegorically displaced by symbolic fulfillments, although we shall see that stated spiritual blessings are also much elaborated on as the original covenant is expanded to particular people by "codicils" down to the end of Genesis (see 26:24, 27:29, 28:15, 35:9-12, 48:3-4, 49:8-10, 50:24). Not once in Genesis is it ever suggested that the promises of a *People* in *their Land* will not be literally fulfilled. There is no hint in Genesis that the Abrahamic Covenant is anything but an unconditional promise of a sovereign God, and nothing in the New Testament denies this, however more "spiritual" some of the added blessings of the New Covenant may be. No added spiritual blessings can set aside the literal earthly blessings so often repeated and confirmed by the voice of Jehovah himself. Four hundred years pass between Genesis 50:26, and Exodus 1:8, and eventually the initial possession of the Land is literally secured by the Conquest after the death of Moses on the eve of entry (Deut 32:43, 49, 34:4, Josh 1:3). We see in this sequence of promises and fulfillments what the word "literal" means when applied to promise and fulfillment. The literal promise may include (or point by metaphors to) a further additional spiritual blessing, but the literal historical fulfillment is never *replaced or displaced* by a symbol, and the literal is never denied or abolished by the symbolic. My conversion to *Ha Meshiach* in 1953 is an example of literal fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in Gen 12:3 that blessing would come to the Gentiles through Abraham, and the People had begun to be back *in literal historic possession* of their Land, although in unbelief, for five years already.

11. *In the history of redemption, the covenant of grace was renewed in Abraham such that he is the father of all who believe (Romans 4:11; John 8:56),*

This is partly correct, except that the phrase should be "a covenant of grace was established." All covenants, including the Noachic Covenant, reveal and express some grace, but the presence of a commonality of grace does not justify the construction of a

meta-covenant behind the historic ones. The individual historic covenants make perfect sense by themselves without getting their meaning from an abstraction. Many further details were added to the first Abrahamic promises, until the Law came by Moses, also in the form of *another* covenant, without in the least altering the character of the original promises of a People in their Land. Paul expressly states that the Promises were *not altered* by the addition of a Law to clarify the nature of sin and point us to Christ (Gal 3:17-19 and 24). Just as Abraham was *literally* justified by faith alone when he believed God, who “counted it to him for righteousness,” so was I *literally* justified by faith alone by believing in the same God in Christ.

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