

16 – Dispensations 13: The Abrahamic Covenant

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GIBS Dispensations

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Open your Bibles to Genesis 12. Tonight we begin looking at the covenants. As I have said many times, the dispensations define the plan of God but the covenants really drive the plan in much respect, and the granddaddy of all the covenants are the Abrahamic covenant and I'm going to be utilizing the PowerPoints from my friend Dr. J. B. Hixson about this. You have been reading, in fact you should have read the entirety of Dr. Showers' book, "There really is a difference." By the way, students, did you read that? Did you find it helpful to kind of understand the gist of things? I'll be glad to answer some questions you might have about it. I'm going to hopefully reinforce what was said there and clarify those things. One thing I forgot to do for you and it would have been more work, but actually there were handouts to go along with all those chapters in the book that you could have filled out. That would have been more work. It might have been more helpful but I didn't think of it until it was too late and I didn't want to lay it on you so that you had to reread the book.

So the Abrahamic covenant. There are three basic approaches to biblical prophecy as far as when the prophetic events of Scripture will be fulfilled and you need to be aware, if you want to say three different schools of thought about prophecy. There is the preterist view. The preterist view says that almost all of prophecy has already been fulfilled in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem and, really, one must use tremendous imaginative interpretation to believe that Matthew 24 that says there has never been such a time on the earth so bad as this, is fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. Then there is the historicist, the historical view basically, and the historical view is basically saying that the events that have been transpiring over the last 2,000 years are the fulfillment of the book of Revelation, and date-setters tend to fall into this kind of a thing. Then there is the futuristic view, which is what we believe, that Christ is building his church today but that much of biblical prophecy will be fulfilled in the future. All of it eventually.

So some differences between dispensational versus covenant theology and, again, this will go right in line with what you have been seeing in your book, "There really is a difference." By the way, was there a question on the value of prophecy there in your handouts? Yeah, so I happened to take that out but let me just say there is tremendous value, actually, in studying prophecy. Prophecy is motivating, you know, for example, 1 John 3, "every man that has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure." Prophecy is comforting. What are the words stated after the rapture passage in 1

Thessalonians 4? "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." It's motivating towards evangelism.

There is a lot of value in prophecy but prophecy does take a willingness to study the Scriptures. You know, I was thinking, Gus, of your question during the break there about, you know, there are a lot of details to prophecy. You know, why did God make it so complicated, in essence is what you were saying. And you know, I get asked the same questions about problem passages, like why Hebrews 6? Why Hebrews 10? Why 2 Peter 2? Why these difficult passages? Again, I think part of it is kind of like the reason he gave the parables, is that you really have to lean on him and listen to him and study God's word to find out the answer. It kind of separates the men from the boys, if you want to say it that way. And I do think, also, we are at some disadvantage because we're living outside of the time it was written and a different language than it was written, a different geography than it was written, so we're crossing several barriers, as it were, when we're trying to understand the pages of the New Testament, and particularly books like the book of Hebrews.

So dispensationalism versus covenant theology. What are some of the differences? Well, the primary difference and the bottom line issue is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, again, is the art of biblical interpretation. We take a literal "normal" view; they allegorize Scripture. And it's funny, they don't do it consistently. I mean, they believe in a literal virgin birth, many of them, and a literal deity of Christ and so forth. But when it comes to prophetic passages, they tend to allegorize it. You see, when it comes to Israel and the church, the difference is we believe in discontinuity where they believe in continuity. In other words, we think there is a difference between Israel and the church based on that literal hermeneutic, and they think there is a continuity in the sense that the Israel was the church, the church began with Abraham, as it were, and that the church is "spiritual Israel."

When it comes to the purpose of God in history, here's the difference, it's doxological versus soteriological. Now, what do we mean by that, doxological? What do we mean by that? Mark was it that? Having to do with the glory of God, where soteriological is having to do with the salvation of man. Now they would argue that it's doxological, too, in the sense that the salvation of man glorifies God, but we would say it's much greater than that as I pointed out before, that the glory of God will be manifested through God's plan for salvation, God's plan for the universe, God's plan for Israel, God's plan for the angels, and so forth and so on. So we see it much bigger in purpose than they do.

By way of eschatology, here's the primary difference: we are premillennial and they amillennial. By premillennial, what do we mean? That Christ will return before the millennium. Amillennial means there is no millennium. There is no millennium. We are living in the kingdom. Wow. That is the difference we'll focus in on, especially as it relates to the covenants here. You see, as I've said before, we believe in the biblical covenants more than the covenant theologians do. They spiritualize them, we believe them literally. We believe that Christ made a promise, God made a promise in the Old Testament and he's going to keep it. They do too, but they allegorize the promises.

So we believe in what's called literal interpretation and I like what Paul Enns, says in his book, "Moody handbook of theology." "Literal interpretation means the words and sentences of Scripture are understood in their normal meaning – the ways that words are understood in normal communication. It is a literal or normal meaning of words that is the basis of communication. Biblically there is a precedence for interpreting the New Testament literally. Old Testament prophecies like Psalm 22; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 53:1-12; Micah 5:2 have all been fulfilled literally." And you see, this is what I would argue is, I would argue that we can learn from New Testament fulfillments how to interpret Old Testament predictions. So did he literally come to Bethlehem? Was he literally born of a virgin? Did he literally get pierced? Well, yes. Well, why would we, then, interpret other prophecies either in the Old Testament and/or in the New in a non-literal way.

What is literal interpretation? Dr. Hixson goes on to say, "Literal interpretation does not preclude the use of figurative language. But it does preclude spiritualized or allegorical interpretations. Literal interpretation also considers the grammatical and historical context of the passage." So you're looking historically, you know, what's going on? Who is being addressed? You're looking grammatically, what does it say? What does language mean?

You see, what unfortunately is happening theologically is what's happening legally in our country. You have judges who allegorize laws. You have constitutional "jurists" who understand the US Constitution in a normal, grammatical, historical, literal, contextual way, and then you have those who disregard it and the difference lies in their method of interpretation. That's why you have "conservative" judges and you have "liberal" judges. Well, theologically you have the same thing and do you know what? These primarily are your method of interpretation.

Now, when it comes to the covenants, again they are the key to understanding God's program for the ages. I've said all along that the dispensations define it, covenants drive that plan, and you really need to understand the covenants if you're really going to understand what's going on and why in the future.

God's eschatological program is prescribed in detail by these covenants and a proper understanding of them is critical to arrive at a sound understanding of eschatology, and that's why we're going to take time to go through them.

Now, remember, there are biblical covenants and there are theological covenants and here's where we differ, again, with covenant theology. You see, covenant theology sees two and maybe three theological covenants in the Bible. Now, ironically none of them are called this, though. They're not called covenants. Do you have these? Yeah, you should, okay? All these PowerPoint slides should be run off.

They have the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, okay? The covenant of redemption is the Father, Son and Spirit in eternity past came to an agreement to not only create man but to provide redemption for fallen men. The covenant of redemption. Question?

Question. Our handout from, I think we have a generic one about covenants and dispensations before we did dispensations, that says, do all covenant theologians believe in that the covenant of redemption is only for the elect? Because that's what it said that they believe in the covenant of redemption for the elect and it talks about the covenant of grace and it promises a life of works and so it's, like, all of them in general pretty much?

Yeah, the covenant of redemption, well, first of all, it's a covenant of redemption by, the covenant is between the Father, the Son and the Spirit to provide redemption for the elect.

Then there's the covenant works, that's Adam in the garden, and obey and you will be blessed and disobey and you'll be cursed. So they see law, basically, right there. Then they have the covenant of grace which the focus they think is on individual redemption. In the Old Testament, the community and national promises to Israel are ignored or downplayed and the individual redemption of the church is emphasized.

You see, they tend to take the New Testament and read it back into the Old Testament where, really, we believe that you have to understand the Old Testament to understand the New Testament. It's the opposite. In fact, covenant theologians will usually say that the Gospel that had to be believed in order for people to be saved in the Old Testament is the same as today, and we would say that the essence of it is the same but the content of it is far different. But many covenant theologians believe you had to believe basically the promise of the Redeemer and that Jesus, "not knowing his name," would die for your sins and be raised from the dead to be saved. The fact is, I think that's possible to possibly even find Scripture to support that but you have to read the New Testament back into the Old Testament to do that. If you were just reading in Genesis and you were reading your way through the Old Testament, would you ever conclude that? Well, no, I don't think you would.

So these are the three things, three covenants they hold to. Now, we believe in probably 8 biblical covenants but 5 major ones, anyhow: Abrahamic, Mosaic, land, Davidic, and new. Okay, you have the 5 major biblical covenants.

Why are they major? Because major only in the sense that a lot of space is given over to them. You have major prophets and you have minor prophets, okay? Does minor prophets mean they're less important? No, it just means a lot less space are given to them, right, than the majors.

Okay, also you have conditional versus unconditional. Are you finding that in your notes? Tracking? Trying? I don't know why it's so difficult but I think it might be the way it was arranged, plus they are on back sides of things. So you've got to remember to turn over the page.

Conditional versus unconditional. There are conditional covenants. Now, in conditional covenants this is what you're going to read. What are you going to read in a conditional covenant? Well, in conditional covenant, its fulfillment depends on the recipient.

Unconditional covenants, God says, "I will. I will. I will. I will." And it's not conditioned on you. There is no "if" attached, and that's why we must distinguish those kinds. That's why we believe that 4 out of those 5 covenants are unconditional. Its fulfillment depends upon the one making the covenant and the one making the covenant is God.

So God's covenant with Israel. You've got the land covenant, the Davidic covenant, the new covenant, and you've got the Mosaic covenant. Which ones are unconditional? Abrahamic, land, Davidic and new. Which one is conditional? Mosaic. Okay?

Now, I changed, it might be different, I think Tom may have run these off and I made a change. Instead of calling it Palestinian, I've made a change to land and so it's JB. I don't like the word Palestinian. It gives the wrong connotation in our day, you know, about the Palestinian conflict. It's really the land covenant. In fact, did you know that even the nation of Israel was not called, the land wasn't called Palestine until relatively recently, like 100 years ago or so.

So when we think of God's covenants with Israel, it's our conviction that those 4 major covenants will be fulfilled in the kingdom to come because they were made to Israel, they've never been fulfilled to the full extent, and they will one day be fulfilled in the kingdom. But the Abrahamic covenant is the priority. It's the granddaddy of them all. It's the big one. It's the first one. Everything kind of feeds off that. If you would like to liken it to a major river and there are 3 tributaries, the 3 tributaries are land, Davidic and new, but the big river is the Abrahamic, as it were. It's the basis for God's entire covenant program and so that's why it's a priority, and it's the first on the list. Furthermore, again, we see this set forth in Galatians 3:14, 29; 4:22-32. Romans 4 emphasizes Matthew 22 and Acts 26.

Certain aspects of this covenant provide a guarantee of specific eschatological blessings. Again, what does "eschatology" mean? Yeah, future prophetic blessing. You see the word eschatos literally means "last things," so it's talking about prophetic things. By the way, historically as you think of the covenants, which one came first? The Abrahamic, so that's why it has priority as well.

Now, I want you to look at the Abrahamic covenant. It should be turned to Genesis 12. Now, let's look actually at Genesis 11. Why don't we start there. I'd like you to start in verse 24.

24 Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and begot Terah. 25 After he begot Terah, Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years, and begot sons and daughters. 26 Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. 27 This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. 28 And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land [which was his native land], in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. 30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

31 And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot [Abram's nephew], the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. 32 So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

So you read this kind of detailed account here about Terah and his family tree, and they left Ur of the Chaldees and they went to the land of Canaan. Question: when you read this, what's the question? Why did they do that? What motivated them to leave home and go to this place? What happened in their life that caused them to do this? Well, chapter 12 tells us what they heard back in Ur of the Chaldees that caused them to do this.

1 Now the LORD [now watch this] had said [what tense is that? past tense] to Abram: "Get out of your country, [notice he said it not to Terah but to Abram] From your family And from your father's house, To a land [please note that] that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." 4 So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. 6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. 9 So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

Now, as we think of the Abrahamic covenant which we just read in chapter 12, verses 1 through 3, we see, first of all, some individual promises for Abraham. We see his name shall be great. By the way, has that been fulfilled? Yeah. I mean, his name is great in Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

He will be the father of a great nation. Is that true? Did God keep that promise? Yeah, it was two strikes in the ninth inning, the bottom of the ninth and he did it, but he did it.

Palestine will be given to him personally, to his seed. Again, you might want to just change that to the land of Israel.

There were also some national promises here. National promises. Not only individual promises but national promises such as a great nation shall come from Abram. That's quite a promise.

Palestine or the land of Israel will be given to him personally as well as to his seed. In fact, the king will proceed from him. The king will proceed from him.

The land of Canaan, I don't know why he called it Palestine earlier, will be an everlasting possession.

These promises are going to be made. They are mentioned in chapter 12, they are ratified in chapter 15, as we're going to see, and that's where you will see more details.

Also there is a universal promise. All families on earth will be blessed ultimately through Abraham, and how is that? Through the coming of Jesus Christ.

The multitude of the seed shall be as the sand of the sea. That's going to be in chapter 15. That's going to be made as well.

He'll be the father of many nations, not just one, and that's going to be mentioned in chapter 15 as well. In fact, as we think of it, oh, and also whoever curses him will be cursed, and whoever blesses him will be blessed. You notice that's across the board.

So let's go to chapter 15, okay?

1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." 2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" 4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." 5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. 7 Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." 8 And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" 9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram;

What does this remind you of? Deep sleep? Adam. If God wants to do something, he puts a man to sleep, doesn't he? He can't screw it up. Furthermore, he puts him in a deep sleep to show that God's going to make this promise and it's not going to be contingent on Abram.

and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

Isn't that pretty incredible? He's predicting the exodus from Egyptian slavery.

14 "And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions [that's exactly what happened]. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

Now, that's a real interesting verse. The Amorites were a local, obviously nation of people, and God is saying, "You know, the iniquities of the Amorites haven't reached the point where I'm going to judge them." God, in a sense, judges nations. By the way, when he judges nations, there is always a time where he judges a nation for eternity by way of, in this case, destruction.

17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying [here's where he ratifies it]: "To your descendants [plural] I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates-- [who lives in that land?] 19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

And so we see here, again, these promises that God made in chapter 12 and ratified in chapter 15, and reiterated over and over again in the Old Testament. You know, one of the things that I really appreciate in Dr. Showers' book, how he shows the perpetuity of the promises, that they will go on. I mean, even though they backslid or they failed, God still kept his promises. God still didn't remove his promise from them.

The Abrahamic covenant and its prophetic implications. First of all, you're going to have a literal future for Israel. If you want to go to Genesis 17, while it's close, verse 19, what do we read? In fact, here's the story where verse 15,

15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 And I will bless her and also give you a son by her [not by Hagar in chapter 16]; then I will bless

her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."

What will come from her? Kings. Kings, that's where that promise was earlier. Kings. People shall come from her.

17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart,

By the way, when he laughed, this was different than when Sarah laughed. You see, when he laughed, he laughed with joy. He believed the promise. When she laughed, she laughed in unbelief and that's why.

and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

Now, this isn't a question of unbelief, this is like a statement of amazement. "You mean to tell me this is going to happen to me? Wow!"

18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"

You see, he's still thinking about his other son at this point.

19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an [what?] everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him."

Now, if it's an everlasting covenant that's made with him, Isaac and his descendants, what is required? That God have Israel indefinitely around, right? A literal future for Israel. How do you get around that? You don't, thus the church today has not replaced Israel in God's covenantal program. We don't believe in replacement theology because we believe God keeps promises like right there, verse 19. National Israel will possess the land some day as well, we believe, because God promised them the land and he promised that it will be theirs forever.

So here are some applications regarding this. Rest in the promises of God regarding future events. Again, what we see in prophecy is designed to encourage us that God is faithful, that God will keep his promises. Again, if he doesn't keep his promises to Israel, why do we think he'll keep his promises to us?

Another application. Marvel at the wonder of God's unconditional love because one of the things that certainly is true in all this is Israel didn't deserve this. In fact, they failed time and time again and yet God kept loving them. Faithful promises. By the way, hasn't he done the same with us?

Embrace a premillennial view of prophecy that is in keeping with the literal interpretation of Scripture. We're not only premillennial, we're pretribulational as well, but his point is

well taken, that Jesus Christ will come back and he will set up a literal kingdom on earth, and he will come back in order to do that, which means it has to be premillennial by way of his return.

Anticipate the return of the Lord to bring to fruition all of the promises rooted in the Abrahamic covenant. I mean, we should definitely believe he's coming again.

Now, whether one is pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation or pre-wrath or post-trib, they're all premillennial. Do you understand that? Let me say that again. Whether one is pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation or pre-wrath or post-trib, they're all still premillennial. The question of all those four statements is: how does Christ's return relate to the tribulation, not to the millennial kingdom?

Questions about the Abrahamic covenant? Wow, that was fast. Also, you've been doing some reading on the Abrahamic covenant, right? You know, this isn't your first rodeo about it. You've studied about it in an Old Testament survey. You've heard about it even in your teaching on the kingdom. We've read about it also.