

The Administration of the Covenant of Grace
Fulfillment in Christ

Richard P. Belcher, Jr.
March 14, 2024

A) Important Characteristics of the Covenants

1) A covenant is more than a contract

2) Marriage is a covenant

a) legal aspects

b) personal aspects

c) corporate aspects

3) God's covenant parallels a covenant relationship of marriage

a) Hosea 1-3 uses Hosea's marriage to Gomer to talk about God's covenant relationship to Israel

-both relationships are to be exclusive relationships

-when Israel breaks the relationship it is called spiritual adultery

b) Ephesians 5 draws parallels between the marriage relationship and the relationship between Christ and his bride the church

4) The various aspects of our covenant relationship

a) Personal: the goal is to be in a personal relationship with God through JC

b) Legal is important because it is the way the covenant relationship is administered

-there is a status of holiness in the NC where you are in the covenant but do not have a personal relationship with God (Rom. 11:27-34)

-the legal aspect is important for the administration of church discipline which is how some branches might be broken off

c) The corporate aspect includes children and the importance of our relationship to the body of Christ

-Presbyterians see baptized children as part of the covenant

-Paul addresses the children in his letter to the Ephesians as part of the covenant community (Eph. 6)

5) Relationships between the covenants in the COG

a) each covenant has a distinctive emphasis that will be fulfilled in Christ or affected by his coming

b) each covenant takes up the promises of the prior covenants until they are fulfilled in Christ

-when another covenant is made it does not mean that the promises of that covenant are no longer important

c) there is a unity of these covenants as they are all working together to be fulfilled in Christ

Fulfillment of OT promises
rbelcher@rts.edu

A) OT Perspective

- 1) The OT promises are set forth in types and shadows of the Old Covenant which will be fulfilled in a greater way in Christ (Heb. 10:1; 11:8-10; WCF 7.5)
- 2) The OT prophetic perspective: when the prophets speak of God's coming to save his people, they also talk about his complete destruction of the enemies at which point history comes to an end in ONE big event (see Joel 2:28-32)

B) NT Fulfillment: what the prophets saw as one big event is worked out in Redemptive History (RH) as two big events (compare Isaiah 61:1-2 with Luke 4:18-19)

- 1) In his first coming Christ came to die on the cross to secure our salvation and to establish his kingdom
 - a) It is a spiritual kingdom that is here now (John 18:36; Matt. 12:28; Rom. 14:17; Matt. 21:31)
 - b) It is a kingdom that will come in fullness when Jesus comes again (1 Cor. 15:50; Rev. 11:15;)
- 2) Adjustments that must be made when thinking about the fulfillment of the OT promises in the kingdom of Christ that is here now but is not yet here in its fullness
 - a) The mission of the church is to take the gospel to the whole world
 - b) God's people are no longer confined to one geographical area but go into all the world
 - c) The church is not a theocracy like Israel was but only has spiritual authority and power from Christ
 - d) The warfare we fight is not physical warfare but a spiritual warfare (Eph. 6)
 - e) We have received a down payment on our salvation, not the fullness of salvation, which means that all the promises of God are ours, but we have not received them in their fullness
 - f) We will receive the fullness of salvation when Christ comes again but until then we may suffer for our faith and many may lose their lives for Christ

C) The fulfillment of the OT covenant promises of God

1) Promises of the Covenant with Abraham

- a) Seed/offspring: a collective singular that can refer to one offspring or many
 - i) singular use to refer to Jesus as the promised one (Gal. 3:16)
 - ii) collective use to refer to Jew and Gentile in Christ who are children of Abr. (Gal. 3:29)
 - iii) the church inherits the OT promises with OT terms applied to her (1 Pet. 2:9-10)
 - iv) Jesus is head of the church and is ruling this world for her benefit (Eph. 1:22-23)
- b) Land given to God's OT people Israel (descendants of Abraham) to fulfill their mission
 - i) It was a type of something far greater that would come in the new heavens and earth
 - ii) Abraham was looking forward to a greater city whose builder is God (Heb. 11:10)
 - iii) The church's mission is to go into all the world with the gospel (Matt. 28:19-20)
 - iv) Abraham is not just heir of the land (OT) but is heir of the world (Rom. 4:13)
- c) Circumcision as a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant
 - i) Gen. 17 is an affirmation of promises already given after Abram's disobedience
 - ii) a sign of the covenant pointing back to the necessity of faith (Gen. 15:6 vs Gen. 16)
 - iii) later it points to the inward reality of a circumcised heart (Deut. 10:16; 30:6)
 - iv) a seal of the righteousness Abraham had by faith while uncircumcised (Rom. 4:11)
-guarantees that Abraham's descendants will experience salvation by faith

2) Promises of the Covenant with Moses

- a) Israel is commissioned as a nation to fulfill her mission (Exod. 19:6; Deut. 4:5-6)
- b) The law as God's revealed will for his people is the distinctive element of this covenant
 - i) the law is given in the context of redemption (Exod. 20:2)
 - ii) the main purpose of the law is to help Israel live in a way that is pleasing to God
-the law is given to further Israel's sanctification (third use of the law)
 - iii) the sacrifices are given because God's people still sin: substitutionary atonement
-the law is given to show us our failure and need of a sacrifice (second use)
 - iv) to fear and honor God will lead to experiencing the blessings of Deut. 28
 - v) to continually reject God will lead to experiencing the curses of Deut. 28
- c) The mission of Israel was to honor God with the promise of great material blessings to draw the nations to her (1 Kings. 4:34, 10:1-13, 23-25; Isa. 2:1-5; Zech. 8:20-23)
- d) Israel failed in her mission (1 Kings 11-12, the history of the NK and SK) so God raised up another servant to fulfill a mission that included suffering (Isa. 42; 49; 50; 53)

- e) Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17-19)
 - i) Fulfill means to confirm and to advance the law
 - ii) There is continuity in the meaning of the law in the NT but the law must be understood in relation to Jesus
 - we worship on Sunday (the Lord's Day) because of the resurrection
 - Jesus fulfills the ceremonial laws of the OT (Book of Hebrews)
 - the second use of the law for justification and the third use of sanctification continues
 - see WCF 19.6 for how the blessings and curses of the covenant apply to a believer today
- 3) Promises of the Covenant with David
 - a) God promises David that one of his descendants would sit in the throne (2 Sam. 7)
 - b) God also promises that if the king disobeys God he will be removed but God will be faithful to the line of David
 - c) The kings of Israel were elevated to the position of the adopted son of God (Ps. 2:7) where they represent the people of Israel and act for them
 - i) Kings were held responsible for their obedience or disobedience to God's law
 - ii) The people are also held responsible for breaking God's law
 - d) Judah, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple were destroyed because of the sin of the people and the king, leading to exile (587 BC)
 - e) A temple was rebuilt (516), the walls of Jerusalem were built (444), but no king occupied the throne paving the way for Christ
 - i) Jesus is recognized as the son of David ()
 - ii) He did not come in his first coming as a conquering king but as a suffering king
 - iii) He will come again as a conquering king (Rev. 19)
- 4) Promises of the New Covenant
 - a) Jeremiah 31:31-34
 - i) Other promises repeated in the context which will also be fulfilled
 - you shall be my people and I will be your God (30:22; 31:1)
 - promise of land: brought back from exile (30:4-11) and repopulation (31:2-6)
 - promise of repentance and forgiveness (30:12-17)
 - promise of a king (33:14-26)
 - ii) The New Covenant (NC) is not like the Mosaic Covenant (31:31-32)
 - promises of the NC and the Mosaic Covenant (MC) are the same
 - the MC partook of the provisional and shadowy nature of OT
 - Moses had no power as mediator to bring about its eschatological fulfillment (i.e., no power to bring to fulfillment the promises of the MC)
 - Christ has the power to completely fulfill the covenant promises (MC is now obsolete, Heb. 8:13)
 - iii) The promises of Jer. 31:31-34 focus on their spiritual relationship with God
 - I will write my law on their hearts
 - I will be their God and they shall be my people
 - they shall know me from the least to the greatest
 - I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more
 - iv) The promises of the NC take on the provisional nature of Christ's kingdom established at his first coming (Eph. 1:13-14, down payment of inheritance)
 - the law is written on our hearts but obedience is not perfected in our lives
 - we are God's people: for true believers this cannot be broken but we still need discipline today to keep us from straying (Heb. 12:3-17)
 - true believers do know God now but not everyone who makes a profession of faith is a true believer (visible/invisible church until Christ comes)
 - we are forgiven of our sins but we still keep sinning and continually need forgiveness
 - b) The legal administration of the covenant (Rom. 11:16-24): because not everyone who makes a profession of faith is a true believer, the church will be a mixed community until the 2nd coming