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Making deals with God

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Every passing day, more and more Christians around the world are discovering within themselves a growing love for Israel and a greater appreciation of God's enduring election over the Jewish people.

Yet many in the growing Christian Zionist movement are no longer comfortable with all the popular 'end-time' charts which portray Israel as just another piece of the prophetic puzzle. Many charts have the Church escaping to heaven while Israel goes through hell. This just seems too impersonal, detached and contrary to their burning, heart-felt passion for Israel.

So rather than speculative charts about future events, many Christian Zionists are looking for a more solid biblical foundation which better expresses their zeal for the Israel of today. And they are finding it in the scriptural tenets of Covenant theology.

While some Christians take a very fatalistic approach to Bible prophecy and often focus too heavily on its dark side, Covenant theology is an uplifting view rooted in the very nature and character of God as eternally faithful to his sworn promises to Israel. It sees the great divine covenants with Abraham, Moses, David and the New Covenant as telling the story of God's salvation plan for all humanity, with the Jewish people playing a central role – both in the past and the future. Indeed, the covenants "belong to" Israel, the Apostle Paul says in Romans 9:4.

Covenant theology holds that Israel's journey down through time, until she reaches her ultimate destiny, is steered by the promises which God delivered by solemn oath to Abraham, Moses and David, culminating with the New Covenant (Hebrews 6:13-20). These covenants set out the terms and conditions for Israel's relationship with God as His primary vehicle for world salvation – which pivoted around her eventual birthing of Jesus, the promised Messiah (Romans 9:5).

The Hebrew prophets then come along as "servants" of the covenants. They cannot go outside the covenant promises and provisions which God has already set out by sworn oath. But their prophetic utterances do tell us something about how God will keep His covenant promises to Israel. Thus interpreting Bible prophecy first requires that we understand the purposes, terms and conditions of the successive covenants with Israel. This is where many Dispensational interpretations go wrong.

Thus the modern-day restoration of Israel can and must be understood, first and foremost, as God being faithful to his covenant promise to Abraham to deliver the Land of Canaan as "an everlasting possession" to his natural descendants (Genesis 17:8). Furthermore, this restoration process will continue until God also fulfills the promises of the Davidic covenant that the Messiah will one day sit on the throne of David and rule the earth from a Jewish Jerusalem and a redeemed nation of Israel.

Such an approach is refreshingly focused on the positive side of Bible prophecy and it is built on solid theological grounds. No wonder Covenant theology is finding so many new Evangelical adherents.

Yet there are some 'prosperity preachers' out there who are latching on to the concept of divine covenant and trying to twist it for carnal purposes. They speak of making "salt covenants" with their

supporters, and promote three-way contracts between you, their ministry and God which guarantee financial blessings in return for donations. In short, they think it is possible to just make deals with God.

This ignores the fact that any divine covenant is first birthed in the very heart of God, and then He finds a suitable human partner to receive the promises. We see this reflected in the Lord's covenant with Noah, which originated "in His heart" (Genesis 8:21). One does not just decide to enter a contract with God; He carefully chooses the vessel to be entrusted with His sure promises.

Each of the divine covenants with Israel also had a unique purpose in furthering the redemptive plan of God. Christians can be third-party beneficiaries of those covenants, but we cannot just make our own separate deals.

In addition, the divine covenants of the Bible are largely unilateral. That is, God usually makes promises that only He can and will perform. Some conditions of performance are placed on the human partner(s), but the core obligations He reserves unto Himself.

This does not mean one cannot make vows before God. But if we do, the Bible is clear we better pay those vows.

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