

The Generational Expectation of Covenants

I. *The Enduring of God's Covenantal Promises*

- A. **Why God's promises must endure.** We have covered many aspects of God's covenants, but one aspect worthy of more attention is the inheritance of God's covenant and His promises through the generations. God's covenants are made to endure with His people forever. We see this expressed in two ways. One way is what Christ teaches us when He proves the resurrection by demonstrating that God is the God of the living (**Mark 12:26-27**). This means that God's people must live forever because His promises are everlasting. However, the other way is that the covenant and its promises must endure to God's people through every generation in this world. This aspect is often overlooked but is an essential part of God's covenant.
- B. **God's intention from the beginning.** When God made His covenant with Adam in the garden, one of His key commands to Adam was to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (**Gen. 1:28**). Why is this the case? Because God intended for His covenant to reach to all of Adam's children as well. The abiding nature of the covenant to all generations is displayed in that we are all sinners in Adam. The blessings and the curses of that covenant were not only for Adam and Eve but for all who would come from them. Therefore, we see another aspect of the seriousness of the sin of the fall. In one sense, in the fall Adam became responsible for the murder of the whole human race. This also gives us a different look at the importance of the promised seed of **Gen. 3:15**. God is ensuring that the legacy of the covenant to all generations will not only be a curse.
- C. **Genealogies.** The genealogies of the seed of the woman are a record of this generational design of the covenant. They are a testimony to God's grace to His people in each generation. He preserves them and cares for them throughout all the days of this life and carries that into the age to come.
- D. **Evidence from the Patriarchs.** This care continues in the other covenants in Genesis. God's covenant love to Noah causes him to command that his sons also be saved and His promise in the covenant is to him and his offspring to every generation (**Gen, 9:8-12**). The covenant to Abraham in particular brings out this emphasis with its focus on the promised seed (**Gen. 17:4-14**). God regularly recites His covenant promises to the patriarchs for His enduring faithfulness to later generations (**Gen. 26:3 & 24; Deut. 7:7-9**).
- E. **The Mosaic Covenant.** God's generational covenant promises also extend into the covenant made with Moses and Israel. We clearly see this in the censuses and the careful provisions God made for His people to keep the land allotted to them throughout every generation.

II. *The Command to Raise Children in the Lord (Deut. 6)*

- A. **Importance of instruction.** Although God has spoken and will surely bring His promises about, it does require something on the part of His people. His promise can overcome their sin, but the way He has ordained for His promises to come is by the faithful instruction of the next generation in the faith (**6:4-9**). This is the most important duty of a parent. Each generation was to learn the commands of God and His great and wonderful works towards them (**6:20-25**).
- B. **Importance of faith.** God's generational promise never worked merely on the basis of lineage. The new birth and the faith that it produces has, since the fall, always been necessary to inherit the true blessings of the covenant. As with the covenant with Adam, the descendants of Israel were truly in the covenant by their lineage, but they would not receive its spiritual blessings apart from true faith. Therefore, careful instruction in these matters by parents and the priesthood was essential since God has ordained for faith ordinarily to come by hearing the word (**Rom. 10:17**).

The Continuation of the Generational Promises in the New Covenant

I. *The Way the Old Testament Speaks of the New Covenant*

A. **Jer. 31:31-34**

1. This passage is regarded as most important concerning the new covenant. It is the only place in the Old Testament where the phrase “new covenant” occurs and it is the passage that the author of Hebrews quotes and expands upon in Heb. 8 and 10. Some use this passage to try and overthrow the principle of God’s generational promises in covenants in respect to the new covenant. They point to the language that says that this covenant will not be like the covenants previously made and that all, from the least to greatest, shall know the Lord. This, they argue, indicates that, although one could be a member of the old covenant on the basis of their birth into a family among God’s people, only those who have faith are members in the new covenant.
2. While understandable, this reading of the passage is not true to the text. First, this commits the text to an overly literal reading of the word “all” in the way many Arminians do in passages such as **1 Tim. 2:3-4 (Jer. 6:13)**. Secondly, to use this passage as a means of determining a kind of excluding of people who were members before is against the idea in the passage. The idea is that faith will swell and permeate the people of God in way that has never been before. It is not attempting to tell us about who is a member in the covenant, but rather the quality of the covenant. Third, although this is the preeminent passage on the new covenant, it is not the only passage, and this understanding is contrary to other passages that speak of the new covenant.

B. **Jer. 32:38-40**. This passage speaks of a covenant that God will make with His people when He gathers them back from exile. He promises to give them one heart to follow Him that He may bless them forever. But this promise is spoken of as being for them and for their children.

C. **Eze. 37:24-26**. God promises once more to set David as king over His people forever. God will make a covenant with them and dwell with them and cause them to walk according to His will. Again, this promise is spoken of in the context of the children of God’s people as well and He promises to multiply them.

D. **Isa. 59:20-21**. God promises that He will come as a redeemer to His people and He will put His word upon their hearts and in their mouths. It will also be in the mouths of their children for generation upon generation.

E. **Isa. 61:8-9**. God promises to make an everlasting covenant with His people and to bless and exalt their children among the nations.

II. *The New Testament Emphasis Upon Covenant Families*

A. In the same way that Abraham and his household are circumcised, households are baptized (**Acts 16; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16**).

B. Unbelieving spouses of believers are sanctified by their relationship to the believing spouse and children of these families are regarded as holy to the Lord (**1 Cor. 7**).

C. The children of the church are addressed by Paul in **Ephesians 6:1-3** and **Colossians 3:20**.

D. Christ shows great care for children, even infants, saying that the kingdom consists of such as they are (**Luke 18:15-17**).

E. The promise of the gospel and salvation is not only to the Jews who believe but is for their children as well (**Acts 2:38-39**).