

Introduction

Covenant vs Dispensation

The two most popular common ways of evaluating the similarities and distinctions between the OT and the NT are covenantal theology and dispensational theology. Both approaches have the same goal - to understand how God's OT promises are fulfilled in the NT. However, they come to opposite conclusions. Covenantal theology stresses the similarities between the OT and NT; dispensational theology stresses the differences between the OT and NT.

My presuppositions: I tend to think that both views fail to adequately relate God's promises to Jesus. That is, one side argues that God's promises to Israel are fulfilled in the church. The other side argues that God's promises to Israel and the church are distinct. I think they both miss the emphasis of Scripture. **ALL of God's promises are fulfilled in Christ.** The New Covenant, promised in Jeremiah 31, fulfills all of God's promises. That covenant is with Jesus and all who are in Him.

Background

Tonight, we will read Joshua 5:1-9. Remember the two major themes of the book of Joshua: God is faithful to His promises and those who have faith in God enjoy a covenant relationship with Him.

The book of Joshua describes God giving the Deuteronomy generation the land He promised to Abraham (cf. Heb 4:8-10; 11:13-16). After Moses's death, Joshua began leading Israel. The previous two chapters (Joshua 3-4) describes Israel crossing the Jordan River. They are now ready to fight Jericho. Before they fight, they renew their covenant obedience.

Biblical Theology

Tonight, we will look at this passage from a biblical theology perspective. Biblical theology refers to God's revelation in Scripture as an unfolding story. That is, God did not reveal everything to Adam and Eve. Although the OT discusses the Trinity quite openly, it is far more explicit in the NT. Although the OT clearly teaches the Messiah would die for sins, it is far more explicit in the NT.

According to Jesus, all of Scripture points to Him. John 5:39 "39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me," John 5:46 "46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me." Luke 24:27 "27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." So, when we read Scripture (OT or NT), we must read it Christologically - How does it relate to Jesus?

Circumcision

Joshua

In Joshua 5:1-9, we read of Israel renewing their covenant faithfulness by obeying God's command for circumcision.

Joshua 5:1-3 "1 As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel. 2 At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time." 3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth."

How did the surrounding nations/tribes feel about Israel crossing the Jordan? Their hearts melted. Rahab said the same thing because of the crossing of the Red Sea and the defeat of the Amorites (Josh 2:8-11).

Before going to fight Jericho, Israel circumcised all of the males in Israel.

Joshua 5:4-7 “4 And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. 5 Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. 6 For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord; the Lord swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 7 So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.”

At what age, were the males in Israel supposed to be circumcised? Genesis 17:12 “12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised...” (cf. Acts 7:8).

(5:5, 7) Why did Israel need to stop for this mass circumcision? Those who were born in Egypt were circumcised; those who were born in the wilderness were not. Other than Joshua and Caleb, everyone was under 60 years old. Those who were 40-60 were already circumcised; those under 40 were not.

Abraham

God established circumcision in His covenant with Abraham. Genesis 17:9-11 “9 And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.”

*According to verse 11, what was the purpose of circumcision? Circumcision was “a sign of the covenant.” A covenant is a relationship two or more people enter into; it is not a contract. For example, a marriage is a form of a covenant - marriage is not an agreement, it is a relationship. Circumcision was the **sign** (symbol or pledge) of the covenant.*

Genesis 17:12-14 “12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, 13 both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.””

Based on verse 14, Why was it important for Israel to circumcise all those who had not been circumcised in the wilderness? Those who are uncircumcised will be cut off from God’s people; they have broken the covenant.

Baptism

Sign of the Covenant

In the NT, what is the sign (symbol, pledge) of our covenant relationship with God?

The most explicit connection between circumcision and baptism in the NT is Colossians 2:11-14 “11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all

our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

(2:11) *What is the difference between OT circumcision and NT circumcision?* NT circumcision is not physical (made without hands), it is spiritual (circumcision of Christ). Romans 2:29 “... circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter ...” Philippians 3:3 “3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—” Acts 7:51 “51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.”

(2:12-14) *According to verses 12-14, what does baptism symbolize?* First, baptism symbolizes our union with Christ. We were buried with Him (2:12) and made alive with Him (2:13). Second, it symbolizes our new life in Christ through forgiveness of sins (2:13-14).

Baptism & salvation

Is baptism required for entering into a relationship with God (salvation)? We won’t dwell on this topic tonight, but here is a quick overview of this question.

There are two major verses used to support the view that baptism is necessary. First, Acts 2:38 “38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Second, 1 Peter 3:21 “21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” **Short response:** Read in the full context, both passages teach that new life (which is salvation) comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit through faith alone in Jesus. In both passages, baptism is a symbol of being filled and cleansed by the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, if one were to argue that these passages teach baptism is necessary for salvation, he would have to reconcile that teaching with other examples in Scripture of salvation preceding baptism or salvation separate from baptism. Here are 3 examples: First, in Luke 23:39-43, one of the criminals crucified with Jesus professes faith in Him and Jesus confirms that the man would go to heaven (paradise) although he was not baptized. Maybe you could argue that he had no **opportunity** for baptism. Second, Paul separated preaching the gospel from baptism, stating that he proclaimed the gospel, but did not baptize people. In fact, that was what God called him to do (proclaim the gospel, but not baptize). 1 Corinthians 1:17 “17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” Third, when Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, they responded with faith and were filled with the Holy Spirit (regeneration, new life) before they were baptized. Acts 10:47 “47 “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?””

Mode of baptism

What is the correct form of baptism, sprinkling, pouring, or immersion? Immersion is the correct form of baptism. One argument against that view is that baptism symbolizes our cleansing from sin (1 Pet 3:21), so sprinkling and pouring adequately show that. *Why is immersion the correct form of baptism?* First, *baptizo* can mean either wash or dip. In the LXX, *Bapto* most often means to dip, but *baptizo* often means to wash. However, by the first century, *baptizo* most often referred to immersion. For example, *baptizo* was used to describe a ship sinking and to describe a person drowning or being drowned (that’s comforting).

Second, baptism symbolizes not only our cleansing; it also symbolizes our union with Christ by the Holy Spirit, dying with Him and resurrecting with Him (Rom 6:3-4).

Third, the examples of baptism in the NT suggest immersion. While some don’t give information about the location, some specify that they needed a body of water, not a cup of water. Acts 8:36–38 “36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went **down into the water**, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.” Matthew 3:16 “16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he **went**

up from the water ...” (cf. Mark 1:10). John 3:23 “23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because **water was plentiful there**, and people were coming and being baptized.”

Infant baptism

Why might someone claim that we should baptize infants? There are two main reasons. First, if baptism is the NT equivalent of circumcision, then we should follow the OT pattern of circumcision on the 8th day after birth. Second, if baptism is the NT equivalent of circumcision, then anyone born into the covenant community (regardless of faith) should be baptized.

The framework of covenant theology is that there are two major covenants in Scripture. First, the covenant of works, which was given to Adam (as the representative of all of humanity). Second, the covenant of grace, which refers to all of God’s covenants in the OT, ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, covenant theologians argue that what we read about Israel in the OT can be applied directly to the church in the NT. Again, this is the opposite of dispensational theology which claims that nothing we read about in the OT can be applied to the church in the NT. Both views fail to recognize that the promises and covenants of the OT are fulfilled in Christ ... not the church.

What is the biblical argument against infant baptism? There are two things that covenant theologians miss. First, the promises and covenants are fulfilled in Christ, not the church. This means that what we read in the OT about Israel should not be applied to the church, it should be applied to Christ. This means that the covenant community is not those within the local assembly of the church. The covenant community is those who are in Christ. Covenant theologians are correct that there are believers and unbelievers in the church. But there are only believers in Christ.

Second, no one is born into the covenant community. A person enters the covenant community through rebirth. John 3:3–6 “3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” John 1:12–13 “12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Conclusion

Circumcision

Joshua 5 is a very important part of the book of Joshua. The book of Joshua teaches that God is faithful to His people. God’s faithfulness is His nature; it is not dependent on our faithfulness (2 Tim 2:13).

Nonetheless, the right response to God’s faithfulness to them was to renew their faithfulness to Him. They had not been obedient to the covenant by neglecting circumcision for 40 years.

Baptism

The same is true under the New Covenant. We are forgiven because of God’s faithfulness, not ours. We are given eternal rest because of God’s faithfulness, not ours. We are brought into a covenant relationship with God because of God’s faithfulness, not ours.

Nonetheless, the right response to God’s faithfulness is to be faithful to Him. We do not obey God to be saved. We do not even obey God primarily because He has saved us. Much like our faithfulness in marriage, **We obey God because we have a covenant relationship with Him. We obey out of love ... not obligation.**