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# READ AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE



A simple guide to understanding more of what you read.

## ISSUE NO. 7 COVENANT CONTEXT (PT 2)

Many people divide the history of the Bible in terms of three ages, corresponding to these covenants: The Patriarchal Age, including the covenant with Noah (Genesis 1–11), the Jewish Age, including the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants (Genesis 12–Acts 1), and the Church Age, including the New Covenant (Acts 2–Revelation 22). Let's look at three applications based on understanding the Mosaic covenant:

1. Covenant blessings to national Israel. We must be careful about applying passages in the Jewish Age intended for national Israel to ourselves individually or corporately today. The Lord's covenant with national Israel, going back to Abraham and dependent upon Israel's obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1), included (a) nationhood dearer to God above all, (b) prosperity, (c) protection against all enemies, (d) success, (e) a promised land, and (f) a law covenant (Genesis 17:6–8; Deuteronomy 28:1–14; Romans 9:4–5). One passage often misapplied by Christians is Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, ... plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Many Christians take the passage to mean that God has a special plan for each individual. The "you," however, refers to the nation of Israel, not to individuals of any age. In Jeremiah, God has been rebuking Judah for their sins and prophesying that they would be taken into exile. Here God also predicts his future plans for blessing Israel after the exile. He will not permanently reject them, but will fulfill his covenant. There is application to us, but it is not on the individual level. This passage teaches that God keeps his covenants. From other passages, we can see a parallel between faithful national Israel and the church. God does have a plan for his church, and it does involve prosperity, hope, and a future, but it is not earthly; it is heavenly. Just like the earthly sanctuary is only a shadow of the heavenly realities (Hebrews 8:5), so also the physical blessings in this passage are but a shadow of the heavenly realities that lie in store for God's people.
- 2.2. The identity of God's people. From creation, during the first age, the Lord was the God of all people, as we mentioned in an earlier feature. With the second age, God chooses a special people, Israel. The third age is back to reconciling all people, because he is the Creator of all. Israel's purpose was to be the vehicle for bringing the Messiah into the world to save all mankind. According to Paul, Israel was not chosen for salvation; they were chosen to fulfill this task (Romans 9–11; I am indebted to Jack Cottrell's commentary, Romans [College Press, 1996, 1998]). So, not all descendants of Israel are in right relationship with God (Romans 9:6), just like not all who call themselves Christians are truly his (1 John 2:19). From this we learn we must maintain a genuine faith that lives in accordance with the Lord's teachings.
3. Teaching on baptism. Because the New Covenant goes into effect after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Hebrews 9:16), Jesus lived his life under the Old Covenant. Some people mistakenly think that the fact that the thief on the cross was not baptized is evidence that baptism has no connection to salvation. However, since the thief died before the New Covenant, there was no such thing as Christian baptism. We must rely on Scriptures found in Acts 2–Revelation to give us examples and teachings about baptism.