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Iran and Israel at War (Part 8)

By

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The 'Holy Writings' of Jews is the Hebrew Bible. The 'Holy Writings' of Muslims is the Qur'an. The 'Holy Writings' of Christians is both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible: known as the Old Testament and New Testament. The fact that Christianity has thousands of divisions, compared to just a handful of divisions for Judaism and Islam each, raises the question why? I believe the way Christians read and understand the Bible is a primary reason. Here are my thoughts on why I believe that is true.

The Bible: Covenants

As we look through the Bible we see God managing His various ‘households.’ One of the primary ways He managed them was through what He called ‘covenants.’ The first time the word was used in the Bible was Genesis 6:18 while God spoke with Noah:

“But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.”

However, I also believe God made a ‘covenant’ with Adam, even though it’s not called that in the Bible – except that some translators use Hosea 6:7 to support the idea of it being a ‘covenant:’

“But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.” ESV

The Hebrew word used in Hosea 6:7 is אָדָם (*kə'ādām*) can be translated as 'men' or 'Adam.' Adam is the name for 'man' or 'humankind.' That's why many English translations do not use the words 'like Adam,' but 'like men' instead.

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:15-17

Here's why I believe those words were 'covenantal'.' The Hebrew word translated covenant is בְּרִית (*briyth*). It means 'a compact, a confederacy, a treaty.' It's like a contract or agreement between two or more people The word is used hundreds of times in the Bible, mostly in the 'Old Testament.' The Greek word for the Hebrew 'covenant' is διαθήκη (*diathéké*). It's a 'disposition, contract, covenant, testament.' The translators of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (the

Septuagint) used the Greek word *diathéké* to translate the Hebrew *briyth*.

We don't know how Adam replied to God, but God created a 'contract' or 'agreement' with Adam. It was a 'conditional' agreement. – even though it appears as a command. God would do something as long as Adam did something. Adam would not die as long as he obeyed God. If Adam disobeyed God, he would die. Some theologians call this the 'Edenic Covenant.' They call the 'agreement' God made with Adam and his wife after they disobeyed Him the 'Adamic Covenant:'

“To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you

shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:16-19

‘Covenants’ in the Bible can include:

- Edenic
- Adamic
- Noahic
- Abrahamic
- Circumcision
- Mosaic
- Palestinian
- Davidic
- New

Some of those agreements with God involved were ‘pre-Israel’ since the name Israel didn’t exist until God changed Jacob’s name in Genesis 32:38. That’s important for Christians who call themselves part of ‘covenant theology’ to understand. Which covenant or covenants? Some ‘covenant’ groups believe in five covenants, some believe in seven, some believe in eight or nine. Knowing what the covenants are, where they are in the Bible, and the context of each covenant is helpful to correctly studying and interpreting Scripture.

One ‘covenant’ that is important for Christians to understand is the ‘new covenant. Jesus used the words when He spoke to His Jewish apostles:

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table.” Luke 19:21

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied a ‘new covenant’ to the ‘house of Israel’ and with the ‘house of Judah’ many centuries earlier:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.” Jeremiah 31:31-32

The Apostle Paul referred to what Jesus said in his first letter to the Christians at Corinth:

“In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” 1 Corinthians 11:25

Paul used the word 'new covenant' in his second letter to the Corinthians, but it has to be studied in such a way that the author's original intended meaning is discovered. That's called 'exegesis' which comes from the Greek word *exēgeisthai* (to lead out). Unfortunately, many people study the Bible the opposite way. It's known as *eisegesis* (to read into). *Exegesis* is objective and depends on a careful study of all of the grammatical and historical aspects of a text. *Eisegesis* is subjective and allows a student to impose their own preconceived ideas onto a text. The more you read and study the Word for yourself (especially from the original languages), the easier it becomes to recognize when a Bible teacher is reading his own ideas into Scripture: making the Bible say what he wants it to say rather than allowing the text to speak for itself.

The Bible: Divided

The use of the word ‘covenant’ in the second part of the Bible (often referred to as the New Testament) usually refers to something Jewish. Here are some examples:

“That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to our father Abraham. Luke 1:71-73

“Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.” Acts 7:8

“... who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over.” Romans 9:4-5

“... unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.” 2 Corinthians 3:13-15

Notice that Paul used the phrase ‘Old Testament,’ which are the Greek words *παλαιᾶς διαθήκης*. The phrase ‘Old and New Testament’ was a way that early Church Fathers (who spoke Greek) described the differences between the various writings in Scripture. The Old Testament included writings from the Hebrew Bible (approx. 30 men wrote between 1440-420 BC), while the New Testament included writings from what has often been referred to as the ‘Christian’ Bible (approx. nine men wrote between 50-95 AD). While it may seem that standardizing the biblical ‘canon’ into those two divisions (Old and New Testament) was helpful to the early Church, it may have set some people off in wrong directions that eventually led to the tens of thousands of ‘church divisions’ we see today.

The Bible: Dispensations

I mentioned earlier that, ‘As we look through the Bible we see God managing His various ‘households.’ The Greek word for ‘managing a household’ is οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*). It’s the idea of ‘stewardship, management, administration, dispensation.’ Jesus used the word three times in His parable known as ‘The Parable of the Unjust Steward.’

“He also said to His disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’ Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’” Luke 16:1-4

Other than Luke the only other New Testament writer to use the word was the Apostle Paul. Some translators chose the word 'stewardship' for *oikonomia*, some used 'management,' and others used 'dispensation.' The King James Version almost always used the word 'dispensation' to translate *oikonomia*. The verb form of the word is οἰκονομέω and means 'to manage as a house steward, to administer an estate, to dispense what belongs to another.'

I know many people who do not like the word 'dispensation' because they believe it competes with the idea of God managing through 'covenants.' I believe that's an unwise way of studying the Bible. If a word is in the Bible, the student needs to determine 'objectively why the Holy Spirit inspired its location and usage in Scripture. Rather than 'compete' with the word 'covenant,' I believe 'dispensation' (*oikonomia*) 'completes' the idea of what God has done, is doing, and will do in accordance with His Eternal plan. He has made 'agreements' (conditional and unconditional) with individuals, families, and large groups of people for thousands of years. He has also 'managed His households' for thousands of years. The Hebrew words that are similar to *oikonomia* are *Al*

ha Beth (על הבית) and *Al ha Bayit* (על הבית). The words are often translated as ‘over the household’ and ‘government.’ It’s not like God just started managing His households two thousand years ago when He inspired the writing of the New Testament.

Here are two examples from the Old Testament:

“And Ahishar was over the household: and Adoniram the son of Abda was over the tribute.” 1 Kings 4:6 (KJV)

“And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah.” Isaiah 22:21 (KJV)

The 1611 version of the King James Bible used the term ‘dispensation’ for *oikonomia* because that was how people referred to the work of a steward or manager of an estate at that time. More recent translations have chosen to do away with the word ‘dispensation,’ but it doesn’t change the original Greek word or its meaning. The noun form οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) comes from the same root and is translated ‘manager, steward, governor, treasurer.’ The root words are οἶκος (household, family) and νόμος (law, regulation). The idea is about the ‘household law.’

Okay, now let’s see some examples from how the Apostle Paul used *oikonomia*. I’m using the New King James Version for the English translation, but remember that the KJV uses ‘dispensation’ while other versions use ‘stewardship’ and ‘management.’

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.” 1 Corinthians 9:16-18

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.” Ephesians 1:7-10

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.” Ephesians 3:1-7

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.” Colossians 1:24-26

Who to?

One of the rules I follow in Bible study (as well as in journalism) is to know ‘who to.’ What I mean by that is to know the recipient of a document, command, etc. The Apostle Paul wrote that, ‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ (2 Timothy 3:16). Notice the wording:

- for doctrine
- for reproof
- for correction
- for instruction in righteousness

All Scripture is profitable (ὠφέλιμος – helpful, serviceable, advantageous) for all Christians. However, that doesn’t mean that every Scripture is written to every Christian. Here are some examples:

“These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain opposite Suph, between Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab..” Deuteronomy 1:1

“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:” James 1:1

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” 1 Peter 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus.’ Ephesians 1:1

Moses spoke to 'all Israel' in the wilderness. James addressed the 'twelve tribes' of Israel which were 'scattered abroad.' Peter wrote to 'the pilgrims of the Dispersion' living in various countries. Paul wrote to 'the saints' at Ephesus who he described as the 'body' of Christ, 'the fullness of Him who fills all in all.'

Different writers, different recipients. Knowing 'who to' is helpful in knowing if you're reading something written 'to you' or if it contains material that will be helpful 'for you.'

Are you a member of one of the tribes of Israel scattered abroad? Probably not. Are you 'pilgrims of the Dispersion?' Probably not. Are you a member of the Body of Christ? You are if you are 'saved.'

Knowing the 'who to' in Scripture will keep you from reading someone else's mail and thinking it was addressed to you.

The Bible is ‘for’ all of us. We learn many things that are helpful. I read through the entire Bible every year or two which includes all of the Old Testament. I know that most of it is addressed to the children of Israel (Jews), but I always find something ‘helpful’ to my understanding about God’s character and plans from Eternity. I sometimes read through Psalms and Proverbs on a monthly basis. Those writings were also addressed to Israel, but I find them ‘helpful’ for me in to consider and enjoy. Even though Moses, Joshua, Samuel and other prophets, and kings David and Solomon didn’t address their writings to Gentile Christians, I still find something that helps me in my life. That’s what Paul meant by what he wrote to Timothy.

However, the specifics of our particular relationship with God are based on His direct communication ‘to’ us as members of Christ’s Body rather than being members of Israel:

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ” Romans 12:4-5

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” 1 Corinthians 12:27

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Ephesians 3:1-6

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Ephesians 4:1-6

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.”

Colossians 1:24-25

Unfortunately, many Christians have been confused about that important point for centuries which and has led to an often divided and weakened group of people.

Next Time

The centuries of misunderstandings about how to study and interpret Scripture have led to some unusual ideas. I'll explain that next time as we continue to look at Iran and Israel at War.

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