

The Relation of the Covenants

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The Relation of the Covenants

After much study of the relation of the new and old covenants, I have come to a place of contentment with my position. I never imagined how intricate the debate would be. In my study, which is short compared to others that have spent their whole lives thinking about these issues, I am coming to a point of understanding of how I view the relation of the covenants.

Israel and the Church

This is the most important question and one which deserves the most attention. I do believe, contra any flavor of Dispensationism, that the Church has replaced the ethnic, national body of the Old Covenant Israel. The Old Testament is riddled with the failure of Israel to follow the Law and therefore maintain the Promised Land.

God did make a promise to Abraham for earthly land, and the narrative of the Old Testament circles around this theme. Israel gets the land, falls, gets back up, and falls again finally resulting in exile. Even though the Jews are allowed back into the land, they do not fully inhabit the land nor is meant to be seen as a reinstatement of Israel to the Promised Land of Canaan. The relation of the Old to the New Covenant is to be understood in pictures and shadows. When properly interpreting the Old Testament through the New Testament lens we can then see what the role of God's working with Israel was suppose to attain.

Types and Shadows

When you interpret the Bible in the redemptive-historical method then we can aptly see how God reveals types and shadows to highlight His redemptive purpose. This is often referred to as Biblical Typology. There is a "type" which is a foreshadowing of an event to come, and then there is an "antitype" which is the fulfillment of the type.

Type	Antitype (Fulfillment)
Geographical Promised Land	Heavenly Promised Land (Heb 11:16; Rev 21:2).
Israel	Typify a believing people of God set apart as a light to the nations. The story of the Old Testament is the failure of Israel in this regard and its completion in the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Rev 5:9).
Moses	An eternal, greater intercessor for the Israel of God in Jesus of Nazareth (Exo 32; Duet 18).
The Seed(s) of Abraham	(1) From Gen 22, the "unique seed" (singular) refers to Christ (Gal 3). (2) Spiritual Seed: All who are the elect of God, Jew or Gentile, who are justified by faith (Rom 4:1-13; Gal 3:29). (3) The special natural seed; those who are a part of

	Old Covenant Israel (Isaac, Ishmael, etc.). ¹
The Temple/Tabernacle	(1) The Messiah (Mat 12:6; Joh 1:14, 2:19). (2) After the resurrection of Christ, the true temple, the Spirit indwells us as a Temple (1 Cor 3:16).
The Sacrificial System	The true sacrifice of God (Heb 10:1-10)

Paul says in his letter to the church at Ephesus how Christ broke down the wall dividing Jews and Gentiles which is the Law/Old Covenant allowing the Gentiles inheritance to the promises of God.²

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands-- remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Ephesians 2:11-16

The New Covenant people of God are all believers (Jer 31:34), and that is why only those who receive the sign of entrance into the New Covenant, commonly called baptism, have to have faith and show fruits of repentance which is a sign of membership into the New Covenant and their election (Rom 6:4-5; 2 Pet 1:10).

¹ John Reisinger in *Abraham's Four Seeds* (pgs. 11-12) makes the thesis that there are four seeds of Abraham: a natural seed (all who descend from Abraham), special natural seed who descend physically from Jacob who became Old Covenant Israel (Isaac, Ishmael), the unique seed (Christ), and the spiritual seed (all the elect of all ages). I think he is mistaken in separating those who descend from Abraham, and those who descend only from Jacob.

² Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations come from the New American Standard Version (NASV).

The Two Reasons to Which Christ Incarnated³

Atonement

There are two main reasons why Christ had to become flesh (Joh 1:1). The first, and the heart of the Christian message, was to serve as a perfect sacrifice because the Old Covenant sacrificial system was only a shadow of the true sacrifice (Heb 10:1-10). He came to serve as a ransom for many (Mat 20:28), to die for the elect throughout all ages (Eph 5:25-27), and He was our substitute receiving our due punishment (Isa 53:6). His atonement purchased common grace for all, but His death in an eternal sense was only for the elect (1 Tim 4:10).

The Blessing of Abraham Will Reach Gentiles

The second reason Christ had to become flesh was that the blessing of Abraham might come to the gentiles.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"-- in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:13-14

God's promise to Abraham which started in Genesis 12 was to be completed by the in bringing of Jews and Gentiles, because God knew from the time He promised Abraham a nation that it would include Gentiles (Gal 3:8-9). The Great Commission of our Lord (Mat 28:19) was simply a restatement of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled in the New Jerusalem where every tribe, tongue, and nation will be represented to the glory of God (Rev 5:9, 7:9).

³ I should say the two soteriological reasons that Christ incarnated. Certainly He came also to fulfill prophecy.

Objections to Dispensationism and Classical Covenant Theology

I agree with John Reisinger on the following assertion:

“Dispensationism cannot get Israel and the church together in any sense whatever, and Covenant Theology cannot get them apart.”⁴

Objections to Dispensationalism

I reject the Dispensational view of (traditionally) seven dispensations each one confined to itself. The hermeneutic of Dispensationalism is also in error. To interpret the Scriptures in the historical-grammatical method is to lose out on the depth and beauty of the Old Testament.⁵ I also disagree with Dispensationalism on seeing a radical distinction between Israel and the Church.⁶

Objections to Classical Covenant Theology

I would also reject the “Covenant of Grace” idea in Classical Covenant Theology that has led to errors of Theonomy, an un-Biblical division of the Mosaic Law, and in Presbyterian circles paedobaptism. Further, I would have issue with seeing a “Church” in the Old Testament, because the Israel of old did not function as the Israel of new. Old Testament Israel was only a shadow of the Church (the “true Israel”); this is true, because Israel contained both elect and un-elect (Isaac/Ishmael, Jacob/Esau), but the Church (New Covenant) contains only believers. I feel it is more Biblical to see “Israel” expanding in the New Testament⁷ then to see a Church in the Old Covenant.⁸ The subject of Law/Gospel is also a point of contention I have with this theological system, but I will explore this more later.

⁴ John G. Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds: A Biblical Examination of the Presuppositions of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism* (pg. 19)

⁵ In contrast, I would agree with Covenant Theology on the Analogy of Faith or interpreting the Old in light of the New.

⁶ This is compounded further, because I am not premillennial.

⁷ That is to say that I see Israel now including gentiles from every nation.

⁸ It should be noted that there is the thick remnant theme throughout the Old Testament who are the elect of God. Paul uses it in Romans 11 to explain how God was faithful to His promises

The Threefold Division of Scripture

This division is only meant to explain how God has worked with His people throughout the ages. This system is meant to be in contrast to both Dispensationism and Classical Covenant Theology. The three divisions are: Creation to the Mosaic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant to The New Covenant, and The New Covenant to consummation.

Creation to the Mosaic Covenant

Any light reader of Scripture will notice that the Bible is divided into the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant is equated with the Mosaic Covenant which included the Mosaic Law, and the New Covenant is that which Christ ushered in (Luk 22:20). But what about the time before the Mosaic Covenant?

When we look at what happened before the Mosaic Covenant we will see that the ramifications of these earlier covenants: Adamic, Noahic, and Abrahamic are binding on all believers throughout both covenants. When we understand how these covenants have ramifications for believers of both covenants then we can make more sense of the division of the New/Old Covenants.

The Adamic Covenant

I do believe that God did institute a covenant with Adam.⁹ He was promised blessing and subduing over creation, but if he broke the covenant than he would die spiritually (Gen 2:16-17). Adam did break the covenant putting mankind into a plight of original sin (Rom 5:12-17). After this fall, all men throughout both covenants are in need of the new birth (Eze 36:26; Joh 3:5).

God promises in the Old Covenant that He will circumcise the heart of the elect (Duet 30:6), and Paul (under the New Covenant) states that those who are truly a “Jew” or elect of God was by circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:23-29). The seed promised in Genesis 3:15 that will crush the serpents head is a promise made to the elect in both the old and new covenants. One theme of the Bible is God’s working of returning a holy people to a holy land as Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden.¹⁰

The Noahic Covenant

Due to the fall and resulting plight of original sin, God passes judgment on His creation through a flood while preserving a “remnant” of Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives, and representatives of the animals. After the flood subsides, God institutes the Noahic

⁹ I do understand that it wasn’t stated specifically stated that God instituted a covenant, but all the elements of a covenant are present.

¹⁰ See *Holy People, Holy Land: A Theological Introduction to the Bible* by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering. The material on the Old Testament is fantastic, but I would reject almost all of their interpretation of the New Testament due to their Catholic and NPP inclinations.

Covenant, symbolized by a rainbow, that He will never again pass such a judgment upon the earth regardless of whether in the Old or New Covenants.

“I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

Genesis 9:13-16

The Abrahamic Covenant

In the Abrahamic Covenant, God reveals His plan of redemption with Abraham at the head. Abraham is promised geographic land, blessing, and a nation. He is “blessed to be a blessing” (Gen 12:1-3) and so we are today as well. I’ve already mentioned that the land of Canaan was a picture of the Heavenly land, the nation was the elect of God throughout all ages, and the blessing goes forth from Abraham to all the elect of God throughout all ages. Abraham is promised a seed in Genesis 22 after his near-sacrifice of Isaac in the same area where the Messiah would later be sacrificed.¹¹

The Pauline epistles are so important Paul’s articulation that not only are Gentiles heirs to the Abrahamic Covenant but that God foresaw justifying the Gentiles (Gal 3:8-9). Paul says that if we have the faith of Abraham than we have him as a forefather (Rom 4:11),¹² and Abraham was imputed righteousness before circumcision so that he would be the father of all those who would believe (Rom 4:12-13). Clearly, the Abrahamic *spiritual nature* of the Covenant includes both the remnant of the Old Covenant, and all of those in the New Covenant—it spans both of the covenants.

The Mosaic Covenant to the New Covenant

As God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He gave them His laws and statutes at Mt. Sinai through the mediator Moses. This is the start of the “Old” Covenant (2 Cor 3; Heb 8). Understand, when I mean “Old” I’m using it in a sense to describe it as a covenant that has passed away (Heb 8:13), and it has no bearing on the second, better, New Covenant (Heb 8:6). The Mosaic Covenant of rigorous Law was meant only as a means of blessing while inhabiting Canaan.¹³

The Mosaic Covenant was ultimately meant to give us a preview of the better things to come. In fact, even Moses declared that there would be one greater than he:

¹¹ For this and other fascinating insights into the Old Testament shadows of Christ see Edmund Clowney’s *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*.

¹² Paul’s argument in this chapter is that everyone whether under the Mosaic Law (David) or not (Abraham) all are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone regardless of the time period.

¹³ Mark W. Karlberg’s *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (pg. 213).

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' "The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.'"

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

The unfolding nature of this covenant showed the inability of man to stay in covenant with God. Israel went through periods of judges and kings, some do great things, but they all ultimately fall short (Rom 6:23). The temple is built according the Law given to Moses typifying the presence of God in His people. Israel does inherit all of the land promised to Abraham (Gen 15:18) during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 4:20-21; 2 Chr 9:26).

Solomon does of course fall, and the Jews eventually find the temple destroyed and in exile. Judah and Israel split, and then Jeremiah prophecies of the New, better Covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Even though the Jews return to Jerusalem and re-build the temple, it isn't nearly what it was during first temple Judaism, and the people lament. But the message is that they are still in exile—a spiritual exile.

The Davidic Covenant

During the Old Covenant, David is also the recipient of a covenant from God. Nathan receives a vision and tells David of it.

"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."

2 Samuel 7:12-16

This covenant promise for a King, for true restoration, will come from the line of David.

The New Covenant to Consummation

We now see the better, New Covenant which makes everything of old pass away. The New Testament places the Old/New Covenants as diametrically opposed to one another,

especially in regard to obtaining righteousness (Rom 9:31) and atonement (Heb 10:4). Now all nations may come in through the advent of Christ (Rev 5:9).

Jesus comes in and wanders as Israel did in the desert (Mat 4:1-16), comes out of Egypt like the Exodus (Mat 2:13-15), and is baptized in the river where Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land (Mat 3:13-15). Jesus of Nazareth is Israel. John the Baptist, coming from the Tribe of Levi, has the authority to anoint Jesus as the King of Israel just as Samuel anointed David King of Israel (Mat 3:15; cf. 1 Sam 16:1-13). The Davidic Covenant finds its fulfillment in the New Covenant. Jesus inaugurates His Kingdom as King of Israel (Joh 1:49; Mat 4:17).¹⁴

The Mosaic Covenant also finds fulfillment. As Moses goes to a mountain to receive the Old Law, so Jesus goes to a mountain to deliver the New Law (Mat 5-7). I will talk about this more when I probe the issue of Law/Gospel. The New Covenant is the fulfillment of everything in the Old and the promises of the period pre-Mosaic Covenant. Jesus, the King of Israel, will return a people to a holy people in a holy land and remove the spiritual exile from God.

Further, the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) was a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29 which was the inauguration of the New Covenant. Peter also proclaims that the Davidic Covenant was fulfilled with the resurrection of Christ where He now reigns over His Kingdom as the King of Israel.

"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.' Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."

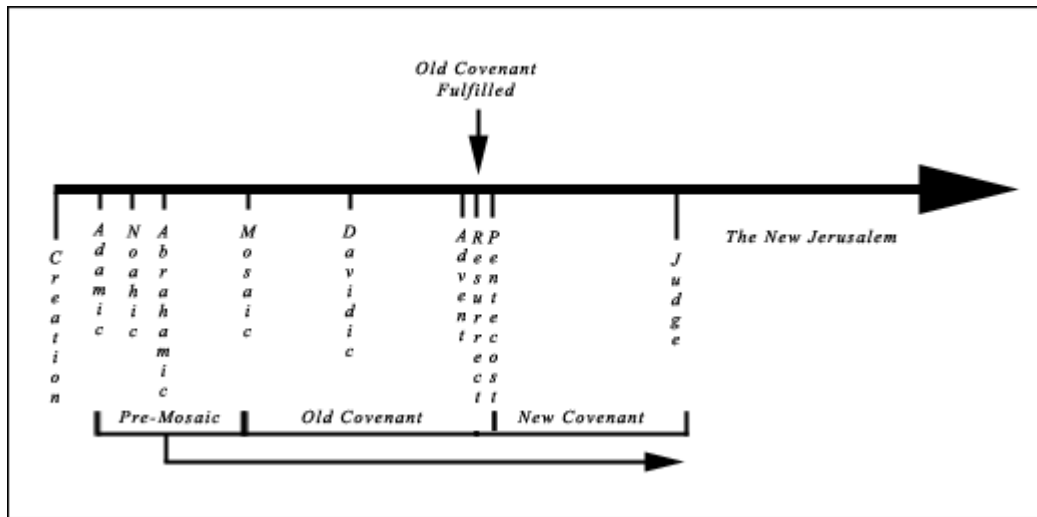
Acts 2:29-36

At consummation, Jesus will return at the end of the "millennium" or the present age for a final judgment (Rev 20:1-6).¹⁵ It is at this time that the true Promised Land will be revealed (Rev 21:2).¹⁶

¹⁴ I'm not going to elaborate on the Kingdom of God or inaugurated eschatology in this article, but it is important to mention its importance and my belief in it. See George Eldon Ladd's *Gospel of the Kingdom* for a defense of this doctrine.

¹⁵ I will also not defend Amillennialism in this essay, but it is important to mention how I view the millennium. See Anthony Hoekema's defense in *The Meaning of the Millennium* (pgs. 155-187).

Here is a diagram representing my view on the Biblical narrative.



This is a visualization of the pre-Mosaic covenants having an effect on both the “Old” and “New” Covenants. Further, it illustrates that the Old Covenant finds fulfillment from the first Advent to Pentecost.

¹⁶ In the “New Jerusalem” (Heaven) the land restoration promises will be fulfilled, such as in Eze 11:17-18.

The Issue of Law/Gospel

I take issue with the Classical Covenant Theology approach to the perpetuity of the Mosaic Law. They would state that whatever is not explicitly abrogated in the New Testament carries over into the New Covenant. I don't believe that is Scriptural for a few reasons.

First, Paul always spoke of the Mosaic Law in its total form—that is all 613 laws and not just 603. I therefore, do not think it is Biblical to refer to the Mosaic Law in a civil, moral, and ceremonial distinction. Such delineation is foreign to the whole record of Scripture. Secondly, the Mosaic Law was instituted for the following reasons: to point forward to Christ (Gal 3:24-26),¹⁷ the Mosaic Law was a unique, historical covenant meant for blessings while inhabiting the Promised Land, with the advent of righteousness there is no need for a system that failed to bring righteousness.¹⁸

Paul also speaks of a better Law giver that being Christ (2 Cor 3), the author to the Hebrews states that with a New Covenant there needs new Law (Heb 7:12), and Jesus came to “fill up” the prophecies and Mosaic Law after His resurrection (Mat 5:17-20; Col 2:16-17). The sign of the Mosaic Covenant, the Decalogue (10 Commandments), was just that, the sign of the Old Covenant. The passing of the Old Covenant means the passing of the sign for a better sign: namely, the shed blood of Christ.

It should be noted that I am not antinomian. I am not against the doctrine of Lordship Salvation,¹⁹ nor do I believe that we are not responsible to any Law. The eternal, unchanging principles of God's Law are expressed both in the new and old Law, but the New Covenant believers²⁰ are responsible to the Law of Christ. Paul himself even stated, as an ethnic Jew, that he is not under the Mosaic Law.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, *though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ*, so that I might win those who are without law.

1 Corinthians 9:20-21 (emphasis added)

¹⁷ For a good exegesis of the passage as historical (which it is often taken out Paul's emphasis on a historical context) see “Do We Need to Preach the Law to Lead People to Christ?” by Steve Lehrer <<http://www.idsaudio.com/blog/?p=143>>

¹⁸ Cf. “How Does the Christian Relate to the Law of Moses” by Robert Lotzer <http://www.covopc.org/Christian_Moses.html>

¹⁹ Cf. http://www.theopedia.com/Lordship_salvation. Lordship Salvation is one of the most important theological truths we as Christians can embrace and understand.

²⁰ And unbelievers as well are responsible to maintain the Law of Christ as unbelievers in the Old Covenant were to obligated to follow God's Law.

Issues Still Open for Decision

The Work of the Holy Spirit throughout the Covenants

I object to the views on the working of the Holy Spirit in both Dispensationism and Classical Covenant Theology. The Dispensationist sees the Holy Spirit as not a regenerative agent in the Old Covenant, and the Classical Covenant Theologian sees the Holy Spirit regenerating and indwelling believers throughout the “Covenant of Grace.” I do believe that the Holy Spirit was a regenerative agent from the beginning (Duet 30:6; Eze 36:26), but the Holy Spirit does work in distinct manner in the New Covenant. The prophecies of Jesus about the Holy Spirit coming in a new manner make no sense in the classical version of Covenant Theology (Joh 16:7, 13).²¹

The Covenant of Redemption and Works

I am still undecided on how I view the Covenant of Redemption in Classical Covenant Theology. I admit that one is led to such a conclusion based on the strong, covenantal language of Jesus in John 17. I would find it hard to deny that there wasn’t some kind of a covenant between the members of the Trinity in redemption.

The Covenant of Works is a term that should be more broadly applied to the covenant that all men are naturally under. The Scriptures are clear that we are judged according to our deeds (Rom 2:6; Rev 20:12), and it seems to me at an early study of this issue that the works that we are judged by are only seen if we are not in Christ. But as I mentioned earlier I do believe Adam was under a covenant. Again, this issue is still open for more discussion.

“All Israel” in Romans 11:26

After a look at the three main positions: spiritual Israel, the remnant, or a national conversion of Jews I am still undecided. I find it hard to justify a spiritual Israel interpretation, because the whole chapter focuses around a national Israel. On the other hand, I don’t know how a national conversion of Jews will fit in with the Biblical view on eschatology; in fact, I think Dispensationism is the only system that can make sense of this view (ascribing this time to the millennium, although I think it’s unfounded). The remnant idea would fit in with how Paul starts the chapter (Rom 11:4), but again I am undecided. I do think to be intellectually and exegetically honest it cannot be a spiritual Israel.²²

²¹ For juxtapositions on this issue, see “Were Old Covenant Believers Indwelt by the Holy Spirit?” by James Hamilton <<http://www.swbts.edu/faculty/jhamilton/documents/them30-1.pdf>>.

²² For a detailed look at these juxtapositions see “The Identity of ‘All Israel’ in Romans 11:26” by Matthew Weymeyer <<http://www.tms.edu/articles/weymeyer.pdf>>.

Conclusion

It is quite apparent that there are many issues in this study. I hope that this sheds some light on the issue for those who are interested. The informed reader might notice that my views are most closely expressed in the label *New Covenant Theology* although I have points of contention even with that system. May God continue to grant us wisdom in handling His beautiful Word and His work in His unfolding revelation.

"Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Psalms 46:10-11