Core Features of Judaic Covenant Viewed Through the

Abrahamic, Sinai, and Davidic Covenant

Bridget N. Lane

George Mason University

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The core of Judaism revolves around the strong premise of covenant between God and the Jewish people. Through three central covenants, God demonstrates not only his unconditional love for the Jewish people but also his desire for them to be made righteous through his laws, designed for the good of his people with intention to draw them closer to him. Spread out over time, the three central covenants of the Judaic religion encompass arguably the largest trials in early Jewish history, as well as the beginning of the foundation of a relationship between God and the Jewish people that would kindle the beginning of a major world religion.

The covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people is not a contract, but rather an act of unconditional love accompanied by signs of recognition performed by the Jewish people as consistent reminders of the love shown to them. A covenant can be compartmentalized into two sections, unconditional promises and laws. The promises made by God are chosen by him, given with no confirmation of a return from the receiver, and are a direct expression of his prerogative. The laws in turn are performed by the Jewish receiver as a sign of the covenant, a human acknowledgement of who God is and what he has given them. Obedience in the covenant relationship is rational, reasoned out of the ample provisions already made for the Jewish people by God.

The Abrahamic covenant is the first covenant between God and the Jewish people, made through the Jewish patriarch Abraham. This covenant bears the same central features seen across the board in covenantal relationships. To begin, God makes unconditional promises to Abraham and his descendants. In Genesis 12:2 (New International Version), God tells Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” In Genesis 17:4-8 God makes more promises to Abraham, telling him that he will be the father of many nations, and that he will receive all of Canaan as his possession. God reaffirms the covenantal relationship in Genesis 17:7 when he says, “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.” God then marks out laws for Abraham and his descendants to follow. In Genesis 12:1, God tells Abraham to leave and go to the land that he will give to Abraham. He changes both Abraham and Sarah’s names in Genesis 17:5 and Genesis 17:15 respectively, and establishes the covenant of circumcision in Genesis 17:10, “This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.” Throughout the text, no conditional language is used, demonstrating that not only does Abraham obey out of love rather than fear, but that the promises themselves are unconditional. The tasks are not performed as a burden, but rather as a token of the promises made and the relationship formed between God and the Jewish people.

After the Abrahamic covenant came the Sinai covenant, which focuses centrally on the Jewish exodus from Egypt and the giving of laws on Mount Sinai. Like all covenants, the Sinai covenant begins with an act of unconditional love from God: the deliverance of the Jewish people from Egypt. In Exodus 19:4 God refers to this act of love, “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” It was out of love that the Jewish people were liberated from Egypt and redeemed from slavery, and this is the motive for them to then keep the covenant and laws that God gives them in Leviticus 19. These laws are willfully carried out by the people as a reminder of their deliverance from Egypt and relationship with God. This event marks God defining the Jewish people as a holy nation, “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.” God tells Moses in Leviticus 19:1. Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, given to Abraham and his descendants, this covenant is issued to the entire Jewish nation; it is the beginning of their status as a nation and religion under God’s deliverance.

The third foundational covenantal relationship is the Davidic covenant. The Davidic covenant foreshadows the beginning of first temple Judaism, as God tells David one of his ancestors will build his temple. This covenant follows the same two-part structure common of all covenants. It begins with unconditional promises to the Davidic line from God. In 2 Samuel 7:9-10 God promises David, “Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed.” God promises that he will build David a house, or dynasty. He follows with laws, saying that David’s descendants will build God a house, the first temple. These things are completed out of unconditional love on God’s part and thankfulness and trust on David’s part, knowing that God has provided everything needed.

These three covenants express the foundation of the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Through historical events and unconditional love, God establishes a nation and religion focused on three central covenants that sit at the core of Judaism. In these different covenants, which bear the same central features, God demonstrates his formation of a holy Jewish nation through his laws and works. This strong premise of promise through covenant becomes the defining feature of Judaism henceforth through Jewish historical events and religious life.

References

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