

## Day 7-Biblical Covenants of the Bible

### Today's Objectives:

- What are the major covenants in the Old Testament
- Which covenants are still in force today?
- Who are the parties in each covenant?
- How does the Mosaic Law relate to believers today?

### Today's Covered Materials:

- Dispensationalism by Dr. Charles Ryrie
  - Chapter 1-*Dispensationalism-Help or Heresy?*
  - Chapter 10-*Covenant Theology*
- Articles by Dr. Stallard
  - *Biblical Covenants*
- Article by David King on Abrahamic Covenant
- Charts
  - Covenants in the Old Testament

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# Biblical Covenants

*Outline & Notes by Mike Stallard*

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## Introduction

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Related to the concept of kingdom is the concept of "covenant" in the Bible. The reason for this is that the fulfillment of the kingdom of God is expressed in terms of covenants which appear to have national and spiritual ramifications. It is also true that one must understand the teachings of the biblical covenants in order to comprehend the nature of the various aspects of the kingdom of God. For example, the basis for a premillennial coming of Christ is not Revelation chapter 20. It is no accident that Dwight Pentecost in *Things to Come* begins (after preliminary hermeneutical discussions) with the biblical covenants as the basis for the premillennial coming of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth. Ryrie does the same in *The Basis for the Premillennial Faith*. In short, we do not need Rev. 20 to be premillennialists. All that Rev. 20 adds is a few details concerning the nature of the millennium (length, relation to resurrections and judgment, relation to Satan). Consequently, we discuss the biblical covenants to begin fleshing out our understanding of the kingdom and to provide the foundation of our future discussion about millennial positions.

When we speak of the biblical covenants we must be careful to point out that we are not talking about the theological covenants (covenant of works, covenant of grace) which are part of Covenant Theology.

In the discussion below, please take the time to examine all of the indicated biblical passages in context.

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## Biblical Terminology and Concepts

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Much space has been taken up in biblical studies about the idea of a biblical covenant with many scholars believing it to be the fundamental theme of the Bible. In my own mind, I prefer to see the concepts of dispensation-covenant-kingdom as forming a kind of overlapping triumvirate of ideas which develop the overall message of Creation-Redemption given in the biblical text. The basic meaning of the Hebrew word for "covenant" (*berith*) can be reviewed in the standard lexical work, Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English lexicon or some other Hebrew-English lexical source.

The word bares some resemblance to the English word "agreement" and is used in the following contexts:

- International treaties (Joshua 9:6; I Kings 15:19)
- Clan alliances (Gen. 14:13)
- Personal agreements (Gen. 31:44)
- Legal contracts (Jer. 34:8-10)
- Loyalty agreements (1 Samuel 20:14-17) -- one example may be marriages (Mal. 2:14)

However, in light of such usages I have come to prefer the word "arrangement" rather than the word "agreement" to express the overall thrust of the word "covenant." The word "arrangement" is broad enough to encompass both the contractual kinds of covenants and the promise or grace covenants as we will see below. The word "agreement" does not express the real idea behind a promise or grace covenant.

When the word is used in relationship to God's activity (especially as it relates to Israel) there has been some debate about its nature. Some of the discussion here could be reviewed in John Walton, *Covenant* (published by Zondervan). Various contexts of the biblical covenants are sometimes emphasized to give the basic thrust of the word and concept in the following ways:

- Covenant as "promise" -- emphasizing the promises of God (such as in Gen. 12:1-3) associated with the arrangement between God and the people involved;
- Covenant as "grace" and "redemption" -- emphasizing that God's work through the covenants entail a measure of his sovereign grace and become part of the history of redemption;
- Covenant as "administrational" or "relational" -- emphasizing that God's work through the biblical covenants comes close or overlaps the special arrangements (might we say "dispensations?") God makes with His people at certain times;
- Covenant as "Vassal Treaty and/or Land Grant" -- emphasizing the eastern customs which lie behind much of the usage of the word.

In my own judgment, we have overdosed on the last option. There appear to be the details of such an arrangement in the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai but the other major biblical covenants seem to reflect more of a grace emphasis than that structure tends to allow. I like Craig Blaising's discussion in chapter 5 of *Progressive Dispensationalism*. He has entitled it "The Structure of Biblical Covenants," and like his chapter on dispensations, it is well worth reading. While I am not a progressive dispensationalist, I believe Blaising has done a good job of discussing the "nature" of biblical covenants. Where I disagree with him is in the NT fulfillment of the biblical covenants. We will discuss this more in a couple of weeks. However, for now note Blaising's categorization of two types of covenants as he discusses the Abrahamic Covenant:

In two passages the term covenant is used to formalize the promise (that is, the collection of promises) as a legal agreement between God and Abraham (Gen. 15:18; 17:2, 7-21). Studies on the form of the Abrahamic covenant indicate that it is a **grant covenant** rather than a **bilateral contract** (as in a business contract or a treaty). That is, it follows the legal form used in the ancient Near East to ensure the integrity of a gift from one person to another, often from a master to a servant (or from a king to a subject). As such, the grant covenant is unconditional, for it guarantees the gift to the master's servant and his heirs (p. 132 -- emphasis mine).

Blaising in this understanding leans heavily upon Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970): 184-203. The two categories might be viewed the following way:

- Grant covenant -- with a focus on God's gracious provision and the promise aspect given in an unconditional fashion;
- Bilateral covenant -- with a focus on the required response of the party who enters into an arrangement with God.

In my judgment, only the Mosaic covenant follows the last pattern. The other major covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and New) follow the grant covenant idea. Therefore, a better word to describe the biblical word COVENANT is the English word ARRANGEMENT rather than the English word AGREEMENT. This is important to remember.

This is not to say that there are no conditionality elements related to grant covenants. There are commands under each covenant and a proper response by God to disobedience mentioned for each covenant. However, the full abrogation of the covenant is not under view in any conditions associated with a grant covenant. Usually, the conditions govern the experience of blessing in a temporal fashion for individuals bound to the covenant promise. This issue is the major controversy between dispensationalists and covenant theologians. The covenant theology position argues that the conditions of the OT covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, & Davidic) were not met and therefore, the nation of Israel has forfeited its right to the covenant. That is, it was a conditional covenant as a whole. The dispensationalist reminds them of the passages which affirm the integrity of the covenants over time (except for the Mosaic) -- in short, God keeps his word to those to whom he makes promises. These ideas will be seen in more detail as we study through the texts concerning each of the major covenants.

## The Biblical Covenants

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## The Edenic or Adamic Covenant

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The so-called Edenic or Adamic Covenant is supposedly the bilateral covenant made between God and Adam in the garden of Eden prior to the fall of man in Genesis 3. In Genesis 2, God gives Adam a calling or job, a commandment, and a companion (in that order). Supposedly, the conditions of the covenant are the ones related to Adam's responsibilities in the garden, especially to stay away from the forbidden fruit. In covenant theology, the Covenant is equated with the Covenant of Works in that theological system. Some dispensationalists view it as the first dispensation without much detailed analysis of its covenantal qualities. However, other dispensationalists ignore the Edenic Covenant in the sense of a covenant. It is not that they deny the significance of the passage (they may hold it as a dispensation), only that they do not view it as a genuine covenant. Regardless of one's view here, it is clear that the pre-fall story of Eden and the tragic account of the Fall, while having the most serious of ramifications anthropologically and soteriologically, does not figure prominently in the debates about the nature of a biblical covenant. *See Hosea 6:7 – Does “Adam” in the Hebrew refer there to men in general or to the man Adam?*

Note: Many theologians make a distinction between the Edenic Covenant (pre-fall) and the Adamic Covenant (post-fall). In the latter case, the judgments of Genesis 3 would form the new features of the arrangement between God and man. However, not every commandment or arrangement in Scripture necessarily has the format of a formal covenant. The burden of proof is on those who want to use covenantal language for Genesis 2 & 3.

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## The Noahic Covenant

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### Please read Gen. 8:15 through 9:17.

Note several elements involved with the establishment of what has come to be called the Noahic Covenant which God made with Noah and his family but which has ramifications for all later generations:

- Gen. 6:18 is the first place that the Hebrew word **berith** (covenant) is used in the Bible (this makes some reject the Edenic situation as a covenant). Again, note the debate over Hosea 6:7.
- Part of the promises given in this section of the Bible are based upon Noah's worship of God through the **public sacrifice** when they came off of the ark (see 8:21-22).
- The outward **sign of the covenant** is the rainbow (9:12-17). In the first occasion in the Bible which gives a discussion of a covenant, the idea of the sign of a covenant is established. This is some outward public display which is a reminder of the details of any promises and conditions of the covenant.
- The **duration of the covenant** is **forever**. God speaks of the covenant as established with Noah and his descendants (9:9). It is also for all successive generations (9:12). Finally, it is spoken of as an **everlasting** covenant (9:16).
- The **scope of the covenant** is all human beings and all flesh on the earth including the animals (v. 11 -- all flesh, v. 12 -- every living creature, v. 15 & 16-- every living creature of all flesh, v. 17 -- all flesh).
- The **commands associated with the covenant** are (1) be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth (9:1, 7), (2) do not eat the blood of animals although men can now eat animals (9:3-4), and (3) practice capital punishment in the case of murder since murdering a man is killing God in effigy (9:5-6). Notice that in the last command, even animals who killed a man had to be killed. This shows the high premium God places on man in spite of the depravity of the human race in its post-fall condition. It also shows that post-fall man is

still in the image of God. Because of the institution of capital punishment, this chapter is often referred to as the establishment of a measure of civil government as an institution by God.

- The **promises of the covenant** are that (1) God will never destroy every living thing again (8:21-22), (2) the animal kingdom will fear man (9:2), (3) man has the right to eat meat (9:3), (4) there will never be another world-wide flood to destroy the earth (9:11, 15).
  - The Noahic Covenant seems to be **unconditional** in the sense that God's promises will come to pass regardless of man's response to the commands associated with the covenant. This does not mean that temporal consequences do not come to the one who disobeys the commands given in the passage. It simply means that the covenant as a whole will come to pass as God promised.
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### The Abrahamic Covenant

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Please read the major passages which give us information about the Abrahamic Covenant:

- Gen. 12:1-3 (note context going back into preceding chapter)
- Gen. 13:14-18
- Gen. 15:1-21
- Gen. 17:1-27
- 1 Chronicles 18:3
- 2 Chronicles 9:25-26
- Acts 3:12-26
- Romans 4
- Gal. 3:1-18

The content of the \*\*Abrahamic Covenant can be summarized in the following promises made by God to him:

- Abraham was to be made a great nation (Gen. 12).
- Abraham was to be blessed (Gen. 12).
- Abraham's name was to be made great (Gen. 12).
- Abraham was to be a blessing (Gen. 12).
- There would be a blessing or curse on those who blessed or cursed Abraham (Gen. 12).
- Abraham was given a definite land (Gen. 12:1, 15:18-21).
- The blessings of the covenant involved God's relationship to Abraham and his descendants and were to last forever (Gen. 17:7).

As one follows the trajectories of these promises as they are played out in the plot line of the Bible, the following chart has commonly been proposed to map the relationship of the Abrahamic Covenant to some of the other biblical covenants:

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT (Gen. 12:1-3)		
THE LAND	THE DAVIDIC	THE NEW COVENANT

<b>COVENANT</b> <b>(Dt. 30:1-8)</b>	<b>COVENANT</b> <b>(2 Sam. 7:8-16)</b>	<b>(Jer. 31:31-34)</b>
<b>Unconditional Ownership, Possession based on obedience, Permanent Ownership</b>	<b>House Kingdom Throne</b>	<b>Forgiveness of sins, Indwelling of the Spirit and divine enablement for obedience, New Nature</b>
<b>LAND</b>	<b>SEED</b>	<b>BLESSING</b>

The **sign of the Abrahamic Covenant** is clearly *circumcision* (Gen. 17:9-14). This must be distinguished from the sign of the Mosaic Covenant which is different (see below) even though the requirement of circumcision is kept under the Mosaic Covenant.

There is an outward **ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant** in the ceremony of Gen. 15: 1-21 given in the form of a vision. This becomes a kind of covenant ceremony (not unlike the marriage covenant ceremony).

The original covenant given in Gen. 12:1-3 is reiterated and enlarged by God in Gen. 13:14-17, Gen. 15:1-21, and Gen. 17:1-8.

The **boundaries of the land of the covenant** are given in Gen. 15:18-21. The "river of Egypt" is probably the Nile river although there is some debate. The Euphrates marks the eastern boundary. It is interesting that this territory has never been possessed by Abraham's descendants. This promise of God awaits a future fulfillment. This idea, which has its trajectory throughout the biblical plot line, begins to lay the groundwork for a premillennial coming of Christ to fulfill these boundary promises.

The **extension of the promises of the covenant to Abraham's descendants** is not only made through statements to Abraham but in statements directly to Isaac (Gen. 17:19; Gen. 26:2-4) and Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15).

The **unconditionality of the Abrahamic Covenant** has been widely debated. Dispensationalism has usually taught the unconditionality of the covenant while Covenant Theology has tried to, at the least, water down any unconditionality. It usually ends up with the promises as fully conditional so that Israel can be replaced by the Church in the plan and promises of God.

There are some passages which do indicate some **conditional elements of the Abrahamic Covenant**. **First**, there is the original promise (Gen. 12:1-3) which is tied to the condition that Abraham leave his country, relatives, and father's house to the promised land (v. 1). This was a necessary prerequisite of the promises of verses 2-3. Of course, Abraham was obedient to this condition. Now, theoretically, the promises must be unconditional since Abraham kept his part of the covenant as God had laid it out for him.

**Second**, there is the condition given in Gen. 17:1-2 -- "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly." Is the condition of walking before God and being blameless a precondition for the establishment of the covenant? The statement could perhaps be taken that way. It could also be taken as a list of three things God is saying without any **if...then** connection:

- (1) I am God Almighty
- (2) Walk before Me . . .
- (3) I will establish My covenant . . .

Grammar and syntax rules in Hebrew seem to allow either approach to the text. The context of God's reaffirmation of the covenant promises in verses 4-7 with its focus on the everlasting nature of the covenant in verse 7 seems to point to the ***unconditionality of the overall covenant***.

**Third**, there is the series of conditions associated with the giving of circumcision as a sign of the covenant in Gen. 17:9-14:

- Verse 9 -- Now as for you, **you shall keep** My covenant . . .
- Verse 10 -- This is my covenant **which you shall keep** . . .
- Verse 14 -- . . . he has **broken** My covenant.

These verses are often taken by covenantalists to teach the conditionality of the covenant. In fact, the verse, according to them, shows that ***the covenant can be broken!*** The basic fault with this thinking is that it ignores the question of how many individuals must break the covenant before the entire covenant is broken? In fact, what is missed is the individual nature of this passage. An individual's participation in the blessings of the covenant are dictated by the fact that he meets the conditions. However, this is a separate question to the historical question of whether in the plan of God the covenant plan as a whole throughout history is kept intact. Notice the following excellent discussion by Craig Blaising:

. . . Abraham's obedience to God's commandments does function as ***the means*** by which he experiences God's blessing on a day to day basis. These commandments function as ***conditions*** for Abraham's ***historical experience*** of divine blessing, for as he obeys God, God blesses him more and more. But these obligations do not condition the fundamental intention to bless Abraham. They condition the ***how*** and the ***when*** of the blessing.

This is perhaps best seen in the Genesis 18:18-19 passage where in the strongest language possible, the Lord declares that "Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed." And then He adds, "For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

If the Abrahamic covenant was a bilateral covenant, verse 18 could not be stated in this factual way (***Progressive Dispensationalism***, p. 133-34).

This truth is bolstered by the additional discussions given in ***Jer. 31:35-37*** (note the context of the New Covenant) and ***Deut. 28-32*** (note the context of the Palestinian Covenant).

#### **The conclusion is that the Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant.**

New Testament appeals to the Abrahamic Covenant also bolster this conclusion. In Romans 4, we have Paul's commentary on Gen. 15:6 (Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness). In discussing this passage, Paul notes that "yet with respect to the promise of God, he [Abraham] did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He [God] had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:20-21). Paul seems to be saying that Abraham's justification was based upon his unconditional faith in a God who could and would keep His promises exactly as He had laid out.

In the well known Pauline comparison of Promise and Law found in Galatians 3, Paul states "*Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many but rather to one, 'and to your seed,' that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise*" (Gal. 3:16-18). Certainly, Covenant Theology with its great unity between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant can not handle these words within the context of its replacement theology and its abrogation of the covenant.

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## The Land Covenant (formerly called the Palestinian Covenant)

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The Land Covenant used to be called the Palestinian Covenant. The co-opting of the Palestinian label by modern Arabs in trying to stand against Israel has forced recent dispensationalists to look for another label.

There is also some debate about whether this is its own stand-alone formal covenant. The key passage would be Deut. 29:1—"These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, *besides the covenant* which He had made with them at Horeb [Sinai]" (emphasis mine). What is meant by these words? The section which follows (especially chapters 29-32) might be the content of this expressed covenant. Although many views abound, there seem to be two main views among dispensationalists and others:

First, there is the view that what is meant here is that Moses is reaffirming the Mosaic Covenant and that the covenant referred to is the entire book of Deuteronomy (which is in some way a reaffirmation of the Mosaic Covenant when they were in Moab about to enter the land).

Second, there is the view that what is meant is a separate covenant designed to emphasize the land promises. In light of the Deut 28 curses, the most major one being removal from the land, the following section is meant to highlight the permanent nature of the land promises to the nation even if they are temporarily removed because of disobedience. They will be brought back and restored (Deut 30:1-10).

In either of these cases, the end result is the same. The land promises are reaffirmed. If the first view is correct they are reaffirmed without special covenant language. In the latter view, they are reaffirmed as a covenant in its own right. I lean toward the last view although both sides have good arguments.

One must remember that land promises figure prominently in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15), in the Davidic Covenant (kingdom promises given in the context of Israel in the land), and in the New Covenant (see Joel 3, Eze.36, etc.)

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## The Mosaic Covenant

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We will not deal at length here with the Mosaic Covenant. Some elements here will be discussed the last session of the course on Law and Grace issues. With the giving of the Decalogue and the Pentateuch and the blessings and cursings of Deut. 28ff, it appears that this covenant is in the form of a bilateral covenant. This is different than the other covenants. Two main points that I want to leave with you are the following:

1. The "conditions" of the Mosaic Covenant cannot unravel the promises of the other covenants (see Gal. 3:16-18).
2. The **sign of the Mosaic Covenant is the Sabbath, not circumcision**. At the end of the giving of the Decalogue to Moses by God, God establishes the sign of the covenant with the nation in much the same way he had established the sign of the rainbow with Noah and circumcision with Abraham. Notice Exodus 31:12-18:

12 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 13 "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; **for this is a sign between Me and you** throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. 14 'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 15 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a

sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. 16 ‘So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, **to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.**’ 17 **“It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever;** for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.”

18 And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God. *The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.*

The problem with this for Covenant Theology is the discontinuity between this sign of the covenant and the overall emphasis it places on circumcision as the sign of the Old Testament part of the Covenant of Grace.

For the dispensationalist, the perpetual nature of this sign might be problematic since the Old Covenant is over and done with in most dispensational theologies. However, it must be pointed out that this is a problem also for Covenant Theology since the New Covenant supposedly replaces the Old Covenant (see Hebrews).

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### The Davidic Covenant

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The major passage is **2 Samuel 7**. Verses 1-7 show the background of David's desire to build a house (temple) for God. God rewards him with a promise that constitutes what has come to be called the Davidic Covenant.

7:1 Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.” 3 And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you.” 4 But it came about in the same night that the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, 5 “Go and say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? 6 “For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. 7 “Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’”’

8 “Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be ruler over My people Israel. 9 “And I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and **I will make you a great name**, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. 10 **“I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again**, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, 11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and **I will give you rest from all your enemies**. The Lord also declares to you that **the Lord will make a house for you**. 12 “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.** 13 “He shall build a house for My name, and **I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever**. 14 **“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, 15 but **My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul**, whom I removed from before you. 16 “And **your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.**”’ 17 In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David. *The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.*

I have highlighted some of the major points in the text above.

### **Personal Provisions (i.e., promises to David himself)**

1. David will obtain a great name (v. 9).
2. David will receive rest from his enemies (v. 11).
3. David will become the head of a dynasty in Israel (v. 11).
4. David will have a son who will establish a kingdom (v. 12) with everlasting qualities (v. 13).

### **Dynastic Provisions (i.e., promises to David with ongoing ramifications through the House of David)**

1. There is an everlasting nature to the dynasty and throne promised to David through his son (v. 13, 16).
2. There is a special relationship (Father/Son) established with David's son and by extension all the kings of Israel (v. 14).
3. There would be correction for the iniquities of his son but correction short of removal of the dynasty as God did in the case of Saul (v. 14-15).

All of the three dynastic provisions point in the direction of the unconditional nature of the Davidic Covenant.

Notice the **later confirmation of the Davidic Covenant:**

#### **Jeremiah 33:14-26 --**

14 ‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 ‘In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. 16 ‘In those days Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she shall be called: the Lord is our righteousness.’ 17 “For thus says the Lord, ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; 18 and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to prepare sacrifices continually.’”

19 And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, 20 “Thus says the Lord, ‘If you can break My covenant for the day, and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, 21 then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers. 22 ‘As the host of heaven cannot be counted, and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.’”

23 And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, 24 “Have you not observed what this people have spoken, saying, ‘The two families which the Lord chose, He has rejected them?’ Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight. 25 “Thus says the Lord, ‘If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, 26 then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.’” *The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.*

#### **2 Chron. 7:17-22 --**

17 “And as for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked even to do according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, 18 then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man to be ruler in Israel.’

19 “But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you and shall go and serve other gods and worship them, 20 then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 21 “As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?’ 22 “And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who brought them from the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore He has brought all this adversity on them.’”

*The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.*

The 2 Chron. passage points out that any son in the line for the throne of David (here it is Solomon that is in view), could by his disobedience eliminate the historical experience of the blessings of the Davidic Covenant for himself. It does not mean that the overall promises to David will be nullified.

The best passage to affirm what I have just said is Psalm 89, my favorite passage on the Davidic Covenant.

**Psalm 89 (the entire Psalm but note the verses below)--**

- 20 "I have found David My servant;  
With My holy oil I have anointed him,  
21 With whom My hand will be established;  
My arm also will strengthen him.  
22 "The enemy will not deceive him,  
Nor the son of wickedness afflict him.  
23 "But I shall crush his adversaries before him,  
And strike those who hate him.  
24 "And My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him,  
And in My name his horn will be exalted.  
25 "I shall also set his hand on the sea,  
And his right hand on the rivers.  
26 "He will cry to Me, '**Thou art my Father,  
My God, and the rock of my salvation.**'  
27 "I also shall make him My first-born,  
The highest of the kings of the earth.  
28 "**My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever,  
And My covenant shall be confirmed to him.**  
29 "**So I will establish his descendants forever,  
And his throne as the days of heaven.**  
30 "If his sons forsake My law,  
And do not walk in My judgments,  
31 If they violate My statutes,  
And do not keep My commandments,  
32 **Then I will visit their transgression with the rod,**  
And their iniquity with stripes.  
33 "**But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him,  
Nor deal falsely in My faithfulness.**  
34 "**My covenant I will not violate,  
Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.**  
35 "Once I have sworn by My holiness;  
I will not lie to David.  
36 "**His descendants shall endure forever,  
And his throne as the sun before Me.**  
37 "**It shall be established forever like the moon,  
And the witness in the sky is faithful.**" [Selah].

*The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.*

These verses reaffirm the general outline I have given above. The overall program of God for the Davidic dynasty cannot fail or be changed. Individual rebellion on the part of a Davidic king could remove him from the blessings of the covenant but the overall covenant cannot be abrogated by God otherwise, according to God's own words, He would be a liar (see. v. 35).

Since we use literal interpretation, David's throne is literal rule of the nation of Israel centered in Jerusalem. The overall unconditional nature of this covenant with David points to the future establishment of this throne in Jerusalem in a permanent way. This fits easily into the premillennial scheme. Amillennial and postmillennial schemes have no place to put such a "Jewish" dynastic promise.

## The New Covenant

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The key passages of the **New Covenant** would be Jer. 31:31-37, Ez. 36:16-38, Joel 2:21-28, Heb. 8, I Cor. 11, Luke 22 (and parallel Gospel passages), 2 Cor. 3. Please take time to read them in context.

The **focus of the New Covenant** on the nation of Israel is clear from the OT passages.

The **provisions of the New Covenant** appear to be the following:

1. God will give a new heart, new spirit, or law on the heart.
2. God will be God in the life of Israel and Judah.
3. There will be personal knowledge of God.
4. There will be forgiveness and cleansing from sin.
5. There will be a pouring out of the Spirit to provide enablement for obedience.

The **central feature of the New Covenant** appears to be # 5 above.

The **basis of the New Covenant** appears to be wrapped up in

1. God's holiness, His faithfulness to His Word and promises (see Ez. & Jer.);
2. The death of Christ on the Cross (see the relationships of Heb. 8-10).

The **fulfillment of the New Covenant** is the place where the most controversy has emerged in theology.

There is only one new covenant in covenant theology tied to the one program for the one people of God (no distinction between Israel and the Church). In dispensationalism, there has been more discussion because of the belief in two peoples of God or two programs of God based upon the distinction between Israel and the Church. Various options have been put forward in the history of dispensationalism"

1. There is **one new covenant to Israel and none to the Church** (although there can be some blessings or fallout for the Church but no new covenant program for the Church). This appears to be Darby's view. In my own thinking, I am close to this approach. The Church enjoys the blessings of the new covenant because of its union with Christ, the giver of the new covenant. This could be seen as the new covenant being applied to the church indirectly. However, this does not mean that there is a new covenant program for them. Certainly it seems to be stretching things to see two new covenants in the Bible.
2. There are **two new covenants**: one for the nation of Israel and one for the Church.
3. There is **one new covenant** which is shared by both Israel and the Church.

For our purposes here, we relate this to the kingdom promises (i.e., toward a premillennial theology) because the fulfillment of the new covenant in OT passages is tied to the presence of Israel in the land in eschatological blessing. **This means that fulfillment of the new covenant awaits the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of the millennial kingdom on earth.**

In Acts 2, the fulfillment of the Joel passage in my judgment follows the line of # 1 above rather than seeing a direct fulfillment related to the Church. It is clear that not all elements of the Joel passage are fulfilled. The Church enjoys the blessings of the Spirit in a way that should make Israel jealous concerning the promises of the New Covenant to them as a nation (cp. Paul in Romans 11:11).

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## Abrahamic Covenant

### 1. What does God promise the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)? How many times does each of the Patriarchs receive the promises we call “**The Abrahamic Covenant**”?

The promise known as the Abrahamic Covenant was first given to Moses in Genesis 12:1-3 while Abraham likely while Abraham was in Haran. The covenant led off with a promise of land; God was leading him from a land that was his father's to a land that would be his own. This land, however, was a land that Abraham had not seen, but it would be revealed to him by God. The next part of the promise was a great nation and as the covenant is restated in Genesis it is clear that what is intended here is the multiplication of his offspring. Abraham would have descendants as innumerable as the stars and the sand on the seashore. The third aspect of the promise is the idea of blessing for his family first and the overflow of that blessing would be to all people forever. All three aspects (land, descendants and blessing) of this covenant are given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with Abraham being reminded five times, Isaac one time and Jacob three times.

All nine times that the covenant is restated there is a reference to land. In Genesis 12 the promise is there, but not as pronounced as future passages will reveal. Genesis 12 says, “a land that I will show you,” but in Genesis 13 this aspect of the promise begins to take shape and grow, “all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.” (Genesis 13:15). Genesis 15:18 lays out the land with more concrete boundaries, “...I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.” The two most veiled reference to the land promise is seen in Genesis 22:17, “...your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies” and Genesis 46:4, “...I will also surely bring you upon again;”. Nonetheless, every restatement of the Abrahamic covenant makes mention of the land promise.

Similarly, the promise of seed is seen in each of the nine restatements of the covenant. Genesis 12 says, “I will make you a great nation;” and the scope of this great nation is elaborated upon in future retellings. One cannot escape the overwhelming emphasis upon the promise of descendants given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Below are just some of the references to seed:

- Genesis 13:16, “...descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then you descendants also could be numbered.”
- Genesis 15:5, “...count the stars if you are able to number them...so shall your descendants be.”
- Genesis 17:2, “...multiply you exceedingly.”
- Genesis 17:4, “...father of many nations.”
- Genesis 17:5, “...exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.”
- Genesis 22:17, “...multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and the sand which is on the seashore;”
- Genesis 26:4, “descendants multiply as the stars of heaven;”
- Genesis 28:13, “descendants shall be as the dust of the earth;”

The final aspect of the covenant is the concept of blessing. This aspect of blessing is of utmost importance to non-Jewish believers as the aspect of blessing overflows into all people and nations. Of interest is the fact that the specific reference to blessing is omitted in five of the nine passages. Abraham was reminded of the covenant in Genesis 13, 15 and 17 without the specific mention of blessing and Jacob, similarly, received the covenant in Genesis 35 and 46 without

specific mention of the aspect of blessing. It is also interesting to note that each time the aspect of blessing is stated, it is always affirmed that the blessing would overflow into all the nations and people. Abraham and Isaac are told “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,” Genesis 22:4; 26:4 and Abraham and Jacob are told “all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” Genesis 12:3; 28:14. This third prong of the covenant, blessing, is the aspect whereby the promised Messiah, Jesus comes and brings salvation to all who will believe.

**2. Blessing is a key provision of the Covenant and this is not limited to the Jews only, but to the whole world. How does this relate to God’s initial intention to bless His creation (1:28-29) and the subsequent curses which resulted from the Fall (3:14-19)?**

God’s promise to bless all the nations through Abraham’s seed finds its greatest fulfillment in the salvation accomplished through Jesus (Galatians 3:8-9) who is of the line of Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant is thus tied to the promise of redemption given in Genesis 3:15 whereby the serpent is crushed by the seed of man. The unfolding of God’s plan is thus seen as He provides a promise of redemption (Genesis 3:15), a family for that redemption (Genesis 12:3) and the person of redemption, Jesus.

**3. Is there any indication in the Covenant that God intended from the beginning to provide a king for Israel? Is there any hint in the Covenant that God intended to provide a messianic savior?**

In Genesis 35:11 it says, “...a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body.” Unlike Abraham who had many sons that were not of promise and Isaac who had one son that was not of the promise, all of Jacob’s were of the promise. In order for Jacob to have kings come from his body it is implied that at some point there would be kings in Israel.

The promise of a Messianic Savior is found in the aspect of the blessing that states that all people of the earth will be blessed. Galatians 3:7 says, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” This seems a clear foreshadowing of a messianic Savior.

**4. Genesis really has two “historical contexts”—the context of the EVENTS (the lives and activities of the Patriarchs themselves) and the context of WRITING (Moses explaining to his foundling nation their heritage). How would the Patriarchal Covenant inform, motivate, or encourage Moses’ first audience, the children of Israel recently freed from slavery?**

The promise given to the Patriarchs would give hope and boldness to enter the land of promise as they see how God had brought them this far. They had progressed as a nation from one man, Abraham, to a nation of a million plus. They had seen God’s hand in their deliverance from Egypt, they had seen God’s provision even during their discipline in the wilderness and now they were on the edge of entering this land that had been promised to their forefathers. God had not led them from Egypt without purpose; they were being led back to the land that was theirs by the promise of God. In fact, Genesis 15:13-14 reminds them that Abraham was told that they would be in bondage for four hundred years before coming out the land with great possession. The receiving of this writing would embolden those believing Jews to enter the Promised Land with confidence that God was with them and God was for them.