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**A1423 – June 8, 2014 – Genesis 12:1-3 – Mark Beall**  
**Survey Of The Biblical Covenants**

This morning I'm going to give a broad overview of the 6 Major Biblical Covenants. Understanding these covenants is critical to understanding the Bible. William F. Albright – archeologist, biblical scholar and professor of Semitic languages at Johns Hopkins University said: “We cannot understand Israelite religion, political organization, or the institution of the Prophets without recognizing the importance of the ‘covenant.’”. And I cannot tell you how much just a very basic knowledge of the Biblical covenants has opened up the Bible for me. As you will see, knowing about them ties everything together and makes sense of so many things that - without this knowledge - just seem very random. So – let's get started. There is a lot to cover.

First, let's define what is meant by the word “covenant”. The OT Hebrew word that is translated into English as “covenant” is “*berit*”, and it has a range of specific meanings as used in Scripture - a treaty, an alliance or league, a constitution or ordinance between a monarch and a subject, an alliance of friendship, or even an alliance of marriage. Rene A. Lopez in his 2003 article “Israelite Covenants in the Light of Ancient Near East Covenants”, reviewed several scholarly articles about the definition of *berit* and concluded that basically *berit* means “‘... a binding agreement between two parties’ ” A problem that I personally have with this definition is that the term “agreement” immediately brings to my mind the idea that each party to the agreement has obligations that must be performed – each party is obligated to do something – and if one party doesn't do it, the other party doesn't have to do what they agreed to do. To me, the term “agreement” works with a conditional covenant like the Mosaic Covenant. However, it doesn't work so good for my understanding of the unconditional Biblical covenants we will discuss. To me, the unconditional covenants are more like

what I think of as “promises” made by one party to the other that don’t depend on anything the other party does. However, agreements are fundamentally promises, so - if you remember that the term “agreement” does not necessarily mean that both parties have obligations - defining *berit* as an agreement will work. Whether you call them “promises” or “agreements”, let’s observe some things about covenants in general.

First – Parties - a covenant will always have parties. Correctly identifying the parties to a covenant is absolutely crucial. It tells you who must fulfill a promise, and it tells you who is entitled to receive the benefits of a promise. The guys who hold to a Replacement Theology – that the Church has taken Israel’s place in the Biblical Covenants – have a problem here. They believe that the Church has replaced Israel, but God’s covenants with Israel are very specific – they are between God and Israel. Not the Church. And this distinction is maintained throughout the Bible.

Another thing – Terms – every covenant has terms – the actual promises or agreements themselves – what the parties are supposed to do. And it is crucial to understand precisely what those terms are. Otherwise, the parties will not be able to tell whether or not they have been faithful to their promises. Clearly defined terms make sure the parties’ expectations of each other are understood – which means that the parties’ faithfulness to their promises can be correctly evaluated. This is most important for the Biblical Covenants because God is one of the parties – if He doesn’t do precisely what He said He will do, then He is not a faithful God. So, we must be very careful to understand exactly what God has promised. Replacement Theology gets in trouble here as well – if the Church has replaced Israel, then Israel can claim that God has not been faithful to them.

Something else about the terms of a covenant – they can be unconditional or they can be conditional. An unconditional covenant is a promise to do something that is not dependent on something else happening. If I tell you, “I promise - if you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor, period” that is an unconditional covenant. I have unconditionally obligated myself. I have to make sure this occurs or I have broken my promise to you.

A conditional covenant is a promise to do something that is dependent on something else happening. It may depend on something that you must do –

For example, if I tell you “if you pay me \$50, I will sell you my car”. My promise to sell you my car is dependent on you paying me \$50. Or a conditional covenant may depend on something else. For example, if I tell you, “if I am elected, I will give you a new phone”, my promise is dependent on whether or not I get elected. Neither of us has control over whether or not I get elected.

If you think about it, only God can truly be counted on to perform an unconditional covenant. Only God is able to be faithful to His promises no matter what else happens. Humans aren't. It's because of God's eternity and His sovereignty – He will always exist and He is in control of everything. Humans die and can't ultimately control anything. I can promise you unconditionally that I will give you my car. I'm standing right there, I have the keys, I have the title, all I need to do is sign it and give it to you. In my next breath, I die – before I give you the keys and sign the title. You are out of luck. Even though my promise was unconditional, it was only unconditional as long as I was alive. It was not really unconditional – it was really conditional – it was dependent on me not dying and there was no way I could control that.

I know this is very basic, but the distinction between unconditional covenants and conditional covenants is very important in understanding the Biblical covenants. If you don't make this distinction, you will completely misunderstand the covenants.

So, every covenant – whether between humans or between God and humans - is going to have Parties and Terms. And the covenant is either going to be conditional or unconditional.

Before we review the Biblical covenants, I need to point out that the Biblical covenants can be viewed in terms of two kinds of ancient covenants – “Royal Grants” and “Vassal/Suzerainty Treaties”. Royal grants are unconditional covenants and Vassal/Suzerainty Treaties are conditional covenants. In a Royal Grant, a stronger party – like a strong king obligates himself to do something for a weaker person without any obligation on the part of the weaker person. An example is a land grant - a king would give land to a loyal subject. In a Vassal/Suzerainty Treaty, the strong king – called the “Suzerain” - agrees to provide benefits to a weaker person – called the

“Vassal” - as long as the Vassal remains loyal to the Suzerain and obeys his rules. Ancient Royal Grants and Vassal/Suzerainty Treaties tended to follow a certain formula: They tended to have a **Preamble** – this described the person who composed the document, an **Historical Prologue** – a review of what the Suzerain had done in the past for the Vassal and why the Vassal owed allegiance to the Suzerain, **Stipulations (or Terms), Duplication and Deposit of the Covenant Document** – the document containing the covenant would be duplicated and deposited with both parties, **Witnesses, Curses and Blessings, a Sign, an Oath of Acceptance, and a Founding Sacrifice**. This is just a formula they tended to follow, not all these elements were present every time.

Several commentators I read pointed out, and I agree, that God used these well known forms of ancient covenant – these weren’t just Israelite forms – they were forms in use by other nations at the time – so that the world would clearly understand that God actually was making legal and binding covenants with Israel.

Ok, with that behind us, let’s go through a bird’s eye review of the major Biblical Covenants.

### The Noahic or New World Covenant

Let’s start from the beginning. God created the world and told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” and gave them dominion to rule over the earth. They disobeyed God, ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and God kicked them out of the Garden of Eden. They had children and descendants, who - although they knew God – refused to honor Him as God and give thanks. They followed the Romans 1:18 pattern Jeremy has been teaching the past few Sundays. As a result, God let them spiral out of control in their depravity, until Genesis 6:5 says “.... the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” In judgment, God sent a global flood to destroy the earth; however, instead of wiping out man entirely, He preserved Noah and his family on the Ark. After a year on the Ark, Noah and his family entered the new post-Flood World. God then made the Noahic Covenant.

The Noahic or New World Covenant is found at Genesis 8:20-21 and Genesis 9:8–17. You can turn there if you want, but I'm just going to summarize the high points. First – the Parties. The parties to the Noahic Covenant are: God, on one side of the covenant. He's the one making the promise. On the other side of the covenant, the parties are everything that got off the Ark and all their descendants. Noah, his family, all the animals, and all their descendants. That's all human beings and all animals - then and now.

Notice who initiated the covenant. God did this on His own initiative. This will be true for all the major Biblical covenants – man doesn't initiate a covenant with God. God initiates a covenant with man.

So what are the Terms of the Noahic Covenant? Genesis 8:20-21 tells us that God will never again curse the ground like He did after the Fall, He will never destroy every living thing like He did with the Flood, and as long as the earth remains, the normal cosmological and environmental processes will remain stable. Genesis 9:11 tells us that God will never again send a global flood to destroy the earth. So, you get two basic promises – one that assures cosmological and environmental stability as long as the earth remains and one that assures that there will never again be a global flood. Notice that God has not promised that the earth will always remain – we know from **2 Peter 3:10** that the earth will ultimately be destroyed by fire and replaced with a new heaven and new earth after the end of the Millennial Kingdom. But what God has promised is that the environment will be relatively stable – though there will be a lot of instability during the Day of the Lord - and when the time comes to destroy the earth, He will not do it with a flood. That's great news, by the way, because without this promise, men would never know if the next rainfall will be the one that takes everyone out. I'm sure that, after going through the Flood, Noah and his family would worry every time they felt a rain drop.

Is God's promise in the Noahic Covenant conditioned on anything that men or animals have to do? If all men were to totally reject God, does this let God off the hook? No, God's promise is unconditional – it doesn't matter what men do or what else happens.

The Noahic Covenant has an obvious sign – something the whole world can see every time it rains. We all know what that is - The Rainbow. Every time

we see a rainbow, we ought to remember the Noahic Covenant and thank God for sustaining us in a relatively stable environment we can live in. Because He is faithful to this promise, while the earth remains, all mankind can be secure that the earth will be a place that men can “live, and move and exist” (Acts 17:28). Unfortunately, as Romans 1 tells us, even though the world knows this, it doesn’t honor God and thank Him.

### The Abrahamic Covenant

At the same time God made the Noahic Covenant, He again gave the 8 remaining humans – Noah and his family – instructions to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”. For the first time, He permitted men to eat meat. Also, He established the death penalty for murder and a new divine institution – civil authority, or government – to carry out the death penalty.

However, the Flood did not wipe out man’s sin nature and Noah and his family brought sin into the post-Flood world. Once again, even though everyone who got off the Ark knew God, mankind quickly turned away from God. Instead of “filling the earth” as God had instructed them, they gathered together at Babel and began to build a city and a tower – an arrogant attempt to exalt themselves and “make their name great” by their own efforts – apart from and in direct disobedience to God. So - God confused their language and scattered them over the earth.

After this, God began a new program for redeeming the world. Up to now, He worked through men in general. Now, He would work through a nation – the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel was intended to be the tool God would use to reveal Himself to the world and work out His plan of redemption. The Abrahamic Covenant is the beginning of this new program. Charles Clough says – *“When God established this formal agreement with Abraham and his progeny in the early second millennium, it made a fundamental change in His relation with mankind that continues through today through the end of time. Before this agreement, post-Flood civilization had access to previous special revelation given from Adam to Noah (the “Noahic Bible”) with possible isolated additional prophetic revelation (Job?). The various people groups were apparently then ruled by king-priests who combined civil and religious authority (Genesis 14:18-24). Afterwards, special revelation comes only through Abraham’s progeny. God’s relation with mankind that had*

*universally shown itself universally corruptible at Babel thus began with **revelational exclusivism**... with this change comes the necessity for communicating the Word of God outward into the world beginning with Israel and continuing today with the Church.*”[Charles Clough, in Chapter 9 – The Socio-Political Implications of the New Covenant – in Cone’s book, An Introduction to the New Covenant] So – the Abrahamic Covenant began a fundamental change with the way God will work with men – He will work through His People – the nation of Israel – to reach the world.

The Abrahamic Covenant is the foundational covenant for all of God’s dealings with Israel. In fact, it is the foundational covenant that underlies the course of all history. There are several passages that, read together, describe the covenant - Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 12:7, Genesis 13:14-17, Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 17:1-21, and Genesis 22:15-18.

First, the Parties. The parties to the Abrahamic Covenant are God, on the one side – the One making the promise, and – on the other side - Abraham and his descendants through Abraham’s son, Isaac, and Isaac’s son, Jacob . As with the Noahic Covenant, notice that God is the One who initiated the covenant. Abraham was not looking for God and he did nothing to merit or deserve God’s choice of him and his family – he was probably worshipping the moon god, as others did in his culture. But, all of a sudden, out of the blue, according solely to God’s sovereign choice – God chose Abraham.

The basic terms of the Abrahamic Covenant are easy to remember – God promised Abraham Land, Seed, and a Worldwide Blessing. The Land promise is this – God will make Abraham a great nation that will possess specific land with some very specific boundaries. This is not some sort of abstract, spiritual land - this is actual physical land on the earth that you can locate on a map. The Seed Promise is this – “God promised that Abraham would father a family ... that would become very numerous and survive throughout all history .... This family would include not only Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve tribes, but ultimately the [Messiah]...” [Clough, Framework Notes, Part 3, Ch. 2]. The Worldwide Blessing Promise is this – all the nations would be blessed through Abraham. When you think of the Worldwide Blessing, you can think of two big things – the Bible and Jesus Christ. The Bible – God’s special revelation of Himself to men – came to the world through Abraham’s



descendants. And Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and Saviour of the world, was a descendant of Abraham.

According to Genesis 17:7-8, the Abrahamic Covenant is an “everlasting” covenant, and the land is given as an “everlasting possession”. It will not end.

Is the Abrahamic Covenant conditional or unconditional? It is unconditional – and God made it in the form of a Royal Grant – God will do everything He promised no matter what Abraham or his descendants – the nation of Israel – do. The nation can reject Him – as it has done – but God will work things out so that, ultimately, they will return to Him and He will fulfill every promise He made to Abraham exactly the way He promised. In fact, in Genesis 15, God confirmed His covenant by an ancient sacrificial ceremony – this is very remarkable - God told Abraham to cut in half a 3 year old heifer, a 3 year old goat, and a ram, and to lay the pieces opposite of each other, along with a turtle dove on one side and a pigeon on the other. God put Abraham in a deep sleep and then appeared in the form of a smoking oven and flaming torch which passed through the pieces of the animals. By doing this, God was saying “may the same thing that happened to these animals happen to me if I do not fulfill my covenant with Abraham”. It is a very serious oath and God was the only one who passed between the pieces – not Abraham. So, God was binding Himself to the Abrahamic Covenant unconditionally, under penalty of damnation. God’s word is good enough without that ceremony – think of how serious God must take His covenant with Abraham if He added this oath to His good word.

Even though God’s promises in the Abrahamic Covenant are unconditional – they will certainly be fulfilled; God will later impose some requirements on the nation in another covenant that condition their possession and enjoyment in the Promised Land on national obedience. That brings up the Mosaic Covenant – so we’ll move on to it.

### The Mosaic Covenant

After Abraham died, the Abrahamic Covenant was confirmed to Isaac, and Jacob, who God renamed Israel. After Jacob’s sons sold their brother Joseph into slavery, God placed Joseph in the second highest position in Egypt – subject only to Pharaoh. Because of Joseph’s position, they were allowed to



move to Egypt during a great famine and Pharaoh allowed them to live in the land of Goshen. The Israelites multiplied and prospered; however, after several generations, a Pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph. This Pharaoh was alarmed because the Israelites were multiplying so rapidly and he thought they might join with his enemies and overthrow him, so he enslaved and persecuted them. God raised up Moses to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt and after 10 plagues that pretty much destroyed Egypt, God brought them out of Egypt – more than 1 million people and probably closer to 2 million – along with a lot of the Egyptian's wealth - to establish the “great nation” He promised to Abraham. God led them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night and, after destroying the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, brought them to Mt. Sinai. There God made the Mosaic Covenant with the new nation of Israel.

The Mosaic Covenant was the body of 613 laws – summarized by the Ten Commandments – that God expected His nation Israel to obey in order to live in the land as His people. There were also specific blessings that God would provide for the nation when they obeyed Him, as well as specific curses He would impose on the nation if they did not obey Him. The blessings involved national peace and prosperity – agricultural, economic, and military. The curses were progressive – physical affliction, agricultural affliction, economic affliction, psychological affliction, military affliction, and ultimately, removal from the Promised Land and scattering among the nations. Each curse was intended to turn up the pressure on Israel in order to convict them to repentance and turn them back to God. This was very gracious on the part of God – the nation could easily see when they were out of God's blessing, repent and return to God, and be blessed again. If they didn't, the curses would become progressively worse so that, at some point, God would have their attention. The whole point, though, was to convict them to national repentance and get them back under God's blessing.

The Mosaic Covenant is fundamentally different from the Noahic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was conditional – in ancient near east terms, it was a Vassal/Suzerainty Treaty. God, being the Suzerain - the powerful king - made a treaty with Israel – the Vassal. God would allow Israel to possess His land and would provide for them and protect them – as long as Israel was loyal to Him and followed his laws. So, the parties to the Mosaic Covenant are God and Israel.

As to the terms of the covenant - both sides had obligations. God to bless and protect, and Israel to remain loyal and obey. As long as the nation of Israel was loyal to God – had no other Gods before Him, and faithfully obeyed His laws, He would allow them to live in the Promised Land and would cause them to prosper and would protect them from the other nations. However, if they were not loyal to God – if they followed idols and did not faithfully obey His laws, He would curse them and, if they did not repent, he would ultimately remove them from the land and scatter them among the nations.

We need to notice that, if the nation did not obey, God obligated Himself to curse them. It's not like God could choose not to curse them if they failed to obey. No – if they failed to obey, God had to curse them. The only way the nation would have any right to live in the land under the blessings of God is if they obeyed. And in order to stay there eternally, as God promised to Abraham, they have to eternally obey.

Which brings up what looks like a huge problem – in the Abrahamic Covenant, God unconditionally promised to Abraham that the nation would eternally possess the Promised Land. However, in the Mosaic Covenant, God bound Himself to curse the nation and remove them from the Promised Land if they were not obedient to the Mosaic Law. If possession of the Promised Land is now made dependent on obedience of the nation by the Mosaic Covenant, how will God ever be able to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant? That's where the Land Covenant and later, the New Covenant, come in.

### The Land Covenant (or Palestinian Covenant)

After God established the Mosaic Covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, He led them to the boundary of the Promised Land and told them to go and take the land. However, despite the fact that God was with them and had already shown them His power and faithfulness – He had preserved them in Egypt for 400 years, He had delivered them out of Egypt, He had parted the Red Sea and destroyed the Egyptian army, He had spoken verbally to them and had given them the Law on Mt. Sinai, He had provided food and water for them the whole time – despite all this, they were afraid of the Canaanites and didn't trust God to deliver the land to them. They were afraid to obey Him and take the land. Their lack of faith was offensive to God and He

punished that generation of Israelites – that generation would never enter the Promised Land. So – God made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that generation died off. However, He didn't abandon them – He was faithful to them and provided everything they needed to exist for those 40 years. When God was ready to allow them to enter the Promised Land, He took them to the east side of the Jordan River and renewed the Mosaic Covenant with them. This is the context in which the Land Covenant was made.

The Land Covenant is based on God's land promise to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant and gives additional information about how God will make the land Israel's permanent possession. It is described in Deuteronomy 30:1-10. In Deuteronomy 28 (like He had done 40 years before in Leviticus 26), God had declared to them the blessings they would receive from Him if they obeyed Him in the land, and the curses He would impose if they disobeyed Him – resulting in the ultimate curse of banishment from the land and scattering among the nations. However, the Land Covenant assures them that He will not abandon them and will remain faithful to His covenant with Abraham – they will not remain scattered, but He will still give them the Promised Land as their eternal possession.

The terms are these: When the Israelites are in the lands to which they have been banished, they will repent and turn back to God. At that time, He promises to gather them in the Promised Land. He will “circumcise their heart” – those that return and their descendants – enabling them to “love the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul” - so that they can live in the Promised Land. He will bless them in the Promised Land and they will prosper. And He will judge their enemies with the curses Israel experienced.

The parties to the Land Covenant are God, on the one side, and the nation of Israel, on the other side. The same parties as the Abrahamic Covenant.

Is this covenant conditional or unconditional? For this we need to distinguish between fulfillment and timing. Its fulfillment is unconditional – fulfillment stands on God's faithfulness to His promise to Abraham, as well as God's promises here. Its timing is conditional – it will not be fulfilled until Israel repents and turns back to God. In other words, it is not a question as to whether or not Israel will repent – it will. The question is – when will this

occur? We know that Israel is still under the ultimate curse of exile. Even though Israel was re-established as a political nation in 1948, and some have returned to a portion of the Promised Land, this is not the re-gathering of the nation described in the Land Covenant because they have not repented and returned to God. It may be preparation for the regathering, but it is not the regathering promised here. Consequently, they are still under the curse and will remain under the curse until sometime during the 7 year tribulation (or Day of the Lord) when they will repent, call upon the name of the Lord, be delivered by Christ at His Second Coming, and be gathered in the Promised Land at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum said this about the Land Covenant: “The special importance of the [Land Covenant] is that it reaffirmed Israel’s title deed to the land. Although she would prove unfaithful and disobedient, the right to the land would never be taken away from her. While her enjoyment of the land is conditioned on obedience, ownership of the land is unconditional.”

### The Davidic Covenant

After this, God allowed the nation to enter the Promised Land. Although He told them to conquer the entire land and “utterly destroy” all the inhabitants, they did not follow His commands and God did not permit them to conquer all the land. God refused to drive out the Canaanites and left them in the land. God told the Israelites at Bochim - **Judges 2:1-3** - <sup>1</sup> “.....“**I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you, <sup>2</sup> and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? <sup>3</sup> “Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they will become *as thorns* in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.’ ”**

Because of their disobedience, the Israelites had to live in the land with the Canaanites who would constantly oppose them and constantly tempt them to be unfaithful and follow other gods. Within a few generations after they entered the Promised Land, they turned away from God and followed the Canaanite gods. This is the period of the Judges. The nation experienced a vicious cycle of its own making – they would turn from God and follow the

Canaanite gods, they would be oppressed by the Canaanites, they would repent and call out to God to deliver them, God would send a judge, and the judge would deliver them. They would then again turn away from God, and start the process all over. This cycle lasted for over 300 years.

At the end of the period of the Judges, **Judges 21:25** tell us that **“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”** Israel had rejected God and it was a mess. Instead of turning back to God, they rejected God as their king, and decided that they needed a human king “like all the other nations”. After warning them how a human king would abuse them, God granted their request and appointed Saul as their first king. Saul did not follow God, and God removed him as king and appointed David king of Israel. Even though he was certainly flawed, and committed some terrible sins with terrible consequences – David had a heart for God – he desired God above anything else. So – even though he sinned, he intensely grieved the separation from God his sin caused, which led him to confess his sin and be restored to God. That is why God called David “a man after God’s own heart”. He was completely devoted to God – he had no other gods before God.

Out of his love for God, David requested that he be allowed to build God a temple. God refused his request - however, God gave him something much better – the Davidic Covenant. The Davidic Covenant can be found at **2 Samuel 7:12-16** and **1 Chronicles 17:11-14**. The two passages are very similar, but their focus is a bit different - 2 Samuel 7 focuses on the more immediate promises concerning David’s son, Solomon, and 2 Chronicles 17 focuses on the eternal promises that will be fulfilled through the Messiah.

Concerning Solomon, God promised:

- that David’s son (who we know to be Solomon) would receive David’s throne after David died,
- that Solomon would build a temple for God, and
- when Solomon sinned he would be disciplined but God would not reject him as He did Saul.

All these promises were fulfilled during Solomon’s reign.

The eternal promises of the Davidic Covenant are:

- That David's "house" would be eternal. By house, God meant that David would always have physical descendants. His family would be eternal. Because Christ is a descendant of David, and is eternal, this "house" promise is fulfilled in Christ.
- That David's "throne" would be eternal. The "throne" means the right to rule – the right to rule as king. This does not mean that all of his descendants would be qualified, and thus able, to exercise this right. It means that the right to rule would never be taken away from David's family. 2 Samuel 7:13 and 1 Chronicles 17:12 limit this to David's descendants through Solomon. Because Christ was a descendant of David through Solomon, and is eternal, this "throne" promise is fulfilled in Christ.
- That David's "kingdom" would be eternal. This is the national kingdom that will be established in the Promised Land when Israel repents and is gathered in the land when Christ returns at His second coming. This is an eternal kingdom. Because Christ is eternal, this "kingdom" promise will be fulfilled in Christ. It has obviously not yet been fulfilled.

The parties to the Davidic Covenant are – God, who made the promises, and David who received the promises. Once again, these promises were initiated by God.

The Davidic Covenant is unconditional – similar to the form of a Royal Grant – there was nothing that David, his descendants, the nation of Israel or anyone else had to do in order for God to be obligated to fulfill His promises. God obligated Himself and He has to fulfill them no matter what.

The Davidic Covenant is based on God's Seed promise to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant and gives us more specific information about the Messiah. Arnold Fruchtembaum says *"According to the Abrahamic Covenant, the Messiah was to be of the Seed of Abraham. This only meant that He was to be a Jew and could be of any of the twelve tribes. Later, in the time of Jacob, the messianic seed aspect was limited to the Tribe of Judah only (Gen 49:10). Now the seed aspect is further narrowed to one family within the Tribe of Judah, the family of David."*

The New Covenant

As God promised David, God established David's son, Solomon, as the next king of Israel. God offered to give Solomon whatever Solomon requested, and Solomon asked for wisdom to rule the nation. God was very pleased with his request and gave him a **“wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.”** God also gave Solomon **“what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days.”**<sup>1</sup> Solomon built the temple as God promised David, and at first, he was devoted to God and ruled wisely. And the nation experienced its “Golden Age” – a time of unprecedented wealth, peace, prosperity and fame – because of David's and Solomon's devotion to God, they experienced the blessings of the Mosaic Law. However, Solomon – influenced by his 700 wives - turned away from God and he began worshipping other gods.

Solomon violated the most basic law of the Mosaic Covenant – he was unfaithful to God – he worshipped other gods. This angered God greatly, and God moved to discipline Solomon and raised up adversaries against him. However, because of His promise to David, God did not take the kingdom away from Solomon - like God had done to Saul. Instead, God allowed Solomon to remain on the throne but told Solomon that when he died, the kingdom would be taken away from Solomon's son. Also – to keep from breaking His covenant with David - God said He would not take the kingdom completely away from Solomon's son. Instead, God divided it into two kingdoms – a northern kingdom (consisting of all the tribes of Israel other than Judah and Benjamin), and a southern kingdom (consisting of Benjamin and Judah). God took the Northern Kingdom away from Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and gave it to Jereboam – who was not of the line of David. God allowed the Southern Kingdom to remain with Solomon's son, Rehoboam, as king. God disciplined Solomon, but kept His promises to David.

After this, the Northern Kingdom never had a king who followed God. It turned away from God for other gods and idols. God, demonstrating His patience and grace, initiated the curses of the Mosaic Covenant and sent the prophets to convict them and call them to repentance. Despite the promised

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<sup>1</sup> *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 1 Ki 3:12–13.



cursings and warnings, the Northern Kingdom refused to repent. In 721 BC, the Northern Kingdom experienced the ultimate curse - God used Assyria to destroy the nation sending the people into exile.

The Southern Kingdom fared a little better. They would occasionally have a king who would turn the people back to God – but eventually, they turned away. As He did for the Northern Kingdom, God initiated the curses and sent prophets call them to repentance. Despite all this, the Southern Kingdom refused to repent. In 586 BC Babylon took Jerusalem, and the Southern Kingdom experienced the ultimate curse and were exiled from the land.

God raised up Jeremiah, a prophet during the time just before and right after the exile of the Southern Kingdom. Jeremiah called the nation to repentance, but when they refused and it became evident that God was going to use Babylon to remove them from the land, Jeremiah called them to remain faithful to God during their exile, and encouraged them by assuring them of God's faithfulness to them - that, ultimately, there would come a time when they would return to the Promised Land, where they would live in obedience to God, and would not be removed from the land again. This is the context in which the New Covenant was promised.

God's promise of a New Covenant is recorded in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**. The parties to the New Covenant are both Northern and Southern Kingdoms – Israel and Judah – the entire Jewish nation. Notice how specific this is – it is both sides of the divided kingdom. The kingdoms will be reunited.

In the New Covenant, God promised to regenerate the entire Jewish nation. He will:

- Forgive and forget their sins.
- Put His law within them and write it on their hearts.
- As a result of these first two –
  - All the Jewish nation will “know” Him.
  - He will be their God and they will be His people.
  - They will be able to live in the Promised Land and receive God's blessings.

The promise to put His law within them and write it on their hearts is very similar to God's promise in the Land Covenant – in **Deuteronomy 30:6** God promised to circumcise the nation's heart and the hearts of their descendants, “to love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul”. This is a promise to regenerate the nation of Israel permanently – every individual for all generations – to give them a new heart that will be completely faithful to God.

Because of the forgiveness of their sin and their regeneration, the Jewish nation will all know Him, from the least to the greatest – “know” meaning that they will have the closest personal relationship a human being can have with God.

Notice that, in order for all this to occur, they have to be reconciled to God. They cannot have this promised relationship with God without the forgiveness of their sins. Their sins must be forgiven.

The New Covenant is unconditional. It amplifies the Worldwide Blessing promise of the Abrahamic Covenant – God promised Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through Abraham. The New Covenant promised salvation to the nation of Israel as God's means of fulfilling His promises in the Abrahamic Covenant. God provided this salvation through the death and resurrection of the Messiah- Jesus Christ. But Christ did not die merely for the salvation of Israel, but God, in His grace and mercy, extended the effects of Christ's death and resurrection to the entire world – so that all the world can be saved. In **Isaiah 49:6 – God speaking about Christ says:** <sup>6</sup> ... **“It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”**

### The Ratification of the New Covenant

Notice that, by its terms, the New Covenant was not actually made in Jeremiah 31. Verse 31 says: <sup>31</sup> **“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...”** This is a promise to make a new covenant in

the future. They would still be under the Mosaic Covenant until it was time for God to make the New Covenant with them.

After this, God allowed a partial return to the land. However, this was only a partial return – not the repentance and regathering God promised in Deuteronomy 30 – which is obvious when you read Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi – the Jews who returned from exile certainly didn't all have a “circumcised heart” and they turned away from God as their ancestors had done.

About 450 years after the partial return from exile, Jesus Christ was born. As Jeremy has been teaching on Wednesday nights, Jesus is the Messiah and, had Israel repented from the false religion of the Pharisees and accepted Christ as the Messiah, God was prepared to forgive their sins and fulfill all His covenants with Israel. All those promises would have been realized had the nation repented and accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah. However, the nation didn't repent and accept Him – they crucified Him. Christ's crucifixion was the Founding Sacrifice of the New Covenant. It was not the fulfillment of the New Covenant, but it ratified the New Covenant. It was the sacrifice that makes the New Covenant possible. Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross for the sins of the world was required to satisfy God's justice and allow Him to forgive sins without compromising His holiness. In other words, because God is holy, He is just, and cannot just overlook sin. Sin has to be paid for – God's justice demands restitution - restitution has to be made. Because He lived a perfectly righteous life – Christ was the only sacrifice that would qualify as restitution for sin. His resurrection is proof that His sacrifice was acceptable to God. Without His sacrifice, God could not fulfill the New Covenant – He could not forgive their sins.

The New Covenant also resolves the problem I pointed out earlier - If possession of the Promised Land is now made dependent on obedience of the nation by the Mosaic Covenant, how will God ever be able to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant? The answer is – the New Covenant – God will act to regenerate Israel so that every one of them will forever be perfectly obedient.

After Christ's death and resurrection, God again offered to fulfill His covenants, if the nation would just repent. That is what Peter told them in **Acts 2:38:** <sup>38</sup> ..... **“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of**

**Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** However, they didn't repent, they continued to reject Christ. And in 70 AD, the Roman army led by the future emperor Titus, took Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, and the Jews were scattered among the nations.

Just like their partial return from exile in Babylon, God has allowed them to begin to return to the land even though they still reject Christ. This appears to be preparatory for God to fulfill His covenants. However, **Romans 11:25** tells us that **“a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in..”** We don't know when the “fullness of the Gentiles will come in”. But we do know that, at that time, the Church will be raptured – taken up into heaven – and God will turn His attention back to Israel. He will turn up the heat on them during the Day of the Lord and they will nationally repent and call upon the name of the Lord. And Jesus Christ will return to save Israel from destruction, and fulfill all the promises God made to them.

That's a birds eye view of the major Biblical Covenants. They reveal some very fundamental things about God. I can't even begin to even think about all the things they tells us about God – I'm sure there is no way anyone could ever list all of them - so I just want to point out two:

**First, God Is a Personal God.** When a covenant is established, it creates a relationship. A good example of a relationship established by a covenant is marriage. The Abrahamic, Mosaic, Land, Davidic and New Covenants are all relationships initiated by God with the nation of Israel. Through these, God made Israel “His possession”, “His Son” and “His wife”. All these are relationships and only persons can have relationships. Fate, Destiny, Mother Nature, the Cosmos, Evolution or whatever other names human beings have called their various God substitutes are not Personal. They are just arrogant and pathetic attempts to suppress the truth about God and replace Him with a god of their own making. These things are impersonal - they can't have relationships. Humans can try to project relationships on them – like a pet rock – but that's all they are – projections of depraved minds. Man doesn't define his relationship with God – God is the one who initiates and defines His relationship with men. The covenants are one reason we can say that God is a Personal God.

**Second, God is a Faithful God.** Let me ask a question – how do you know God is faithful? How do you know that He is able to do what He says He will do? How do you know that He is willing to do what He says He will do? How do you know that He isn't arbitrary – that He won't change His mind and go back on His word? Is there any evidence that verifies His faithfulness? The answer is yes – the evidence is History. History is the evidence that verifies God's faithfulness.

Let's go a little deeper on this. In order for History to verify something about God, you have to have two things – an accurate record of what God said He will do and an accurate record of what God actually did. What is our only reliable source of what God said? The Bible. How do we know what God actually did? History. What is our only reliable source of what God actually did in History? The Bible. The Bible is the only reliable source of what God said and what God actually did in History because it is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. If the Bible has errors – any errors – it is demonstrably not reliable. And if it is not reliable, then we have no way of verifying that God actually does what He says - we cannot verify that He is actually faithful. We can say He is faithful, and we can choose to believe He is faithful, but we do not have any reasonable basis at all for that belief. It would be something we just made up about God.

That is why the unbelieving world works so hard to discredit the Bible. If it can be shown to be unreliable, then our faith in God really is a “leap of faith” – just a groundless wish that maybe God is faithful, loving, forgiving, etc... And if that's the case, who wants to have that kind of faith?

Verifiability is also why we must interpret the Bible literally – according to the plain meaning of the text as intended by its author at the time it was written. Because if we don't, and we get into allegorical interpretation, and the meaning is lost – who's to say what the Bible really means? And if we can't accurately determine the meaning of the Bible, then we can't accurately determine what God said and we can't accurately verify whether or not He did what He said He would do. Once again, our faith becomes groundless.

God, to accomplish His plan, and in His inexpressible wisdom, grace, mercy, love and compassion, bound Himself to man and initiated the Biblical

Covenants – covenants which are specific, and verifiable in History. He didn't have to do this – He could have accomplished His plans without them. He didn't have to tell us. But He did, and by doing so, He verifies that He is Almighty God – both willing and able to do what He says. If what He says does not come about the way He says it will in History, then either God is not able to do what He said – which means He is not Almighty – He is not sovereign and something out there is bigger than He is – or He is not willing to do what He said – which means that He is unfaithful and can't be trusted.

This is another huge flaw with Replacement Theology – the idea that the Church has replaced Israel as a party to the Biblical Covenants. That idea is an attack on God's faithfulness. God made the promises to Israel, not the Church, if God has now rejected Israel and replaced the nation with the Church, then I'm sorry – God has not kept His word and He is demonstrably unfaithful and we can't trust Him. Paul understood this and that is why he spent 3 chapters in Romans – Romans 9, 10 and 11 – explaining that God has not rejected Israel and will ultimately fulfill His promises to them. In fact, he says in Romans 11:1 – “**<sup>1</sup> I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!...**”. Paul knew what damage would be done to God's name if God rejected Israel – and he denied the possibility in the strongest terms.

However, God is faithful. And we can verify this because He has spoken to men, told them what He was going to do, did it, men observed it. And God inspired the writing of Scripture – the record of what He said and what He did – and has preserved it for all these years – so that every generation – including ours – can read the record and verify God's faithfulness to His word. And that is why the Christian faith is reasonable and rational – we place our faith in God who has shown us that He is always faithful to His promises.

So – if you are here today and you have not placed your faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and to receive the eternal life that God Himself has promised, you can rest assured that, if you do so, the God who has and will faithfully fulfill all His promises, will forgive your sins and will grant to you eternal life. You don't need to do anything other than believe – you don't need to walk the aisle, say a specific prayer, or anything like that – you can just believe and you will have eternal life.

[Back To The Top](#)

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