

## KINGDOM THROUGH COVENANTS

### 1. The Kingdom of God is the Grand Theme of Scripture

Patrick Schreiner: “*The Bible is most fundamentally a narrative, and the kingdom of God is the thematic framework for that narrative.*”<sup>1</sup>

Walter Kaiser: The kingdom “[has] a central place in the whole promise-plan of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Alva McClain: “*The Kingdom of God is, in a certain and important sense, the grand central theme of all Holy Scripture.*”<sup>3</sup>

Michael Vlach: “*When you study the kingdom you are examining the grand theme of Scripture and the solution for all that’s wrong.*”<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Common Misunderstandings of the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is commonly misunderstood in a number of ways:

- a. The kingdom is only in the past—synonymous with the kingdom of Israel.
- b. The kingdom is only on the future—synonymous with Christ’s reign in the eternal state.
- c. The kingdom is only physical—synonymous with theonomy.
- d. The kingdom is only spiritual—synonymous with the church.

- “The kingdom is not physical; it is spiritual.”
- “The kingdom is no longer about nations; it is about individuals.”
- “The kingdom is no longer about Israel; it is about Jesus.”
- “The kingdom is no longer national; it is international.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, ed. Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual and National,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 291.

<sup>3</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), 4–5.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2017), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 16.

Schreiner: *"In more popular evangelical circles the kingdom becomes a euphemism for the rule of God in one's heart. The kingdom thus coils into an inward, subjective mechanism, a secret power that enters the human soul and lays hold of it."*<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Definition of the Kingdom of God

The biblical concept of kingdom includes, *"the right to rule, a realm in which ruling authority is exercised, and the reality of that authority actually being exercised"* (Pentecost).<sup>7</sup>

Pentecost: *"Essential to the meaning of the word kingdom is the actual exercise of authority in a realm over which one has the sovereign right to rule. If the exercise of authority is not in view, the concept of kingdom is not present."*<sup>8</sup>

McClain: *"The concept of a 'kingdom' envisages a total situation containing at least three essential elements:*

*first, a ruler with adequate authority and power;  
second, a realm of subjects to be ruled;  
and third, the actual exercise of the function of rulership."*<sup>9</sup>

Summary: *"There can be no kingdom in the total sense without the ruler, the realm, and the reigning function."*

Schreiner: *"The kingdom is the King's power over the King's people in the King's place."*<sup>10</sup>

Definition: *"The 'Kingdom of God' may be defined broadly as the rule of God over His creation."*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God's Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises throughout History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995), 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 19.

## 4. The Universal and the Mediatorial Kingdom

We must contrast two concepts—

Universal kingdom: “God’s absolute sovereignty and control over all creation from heaven at all times.”<sup>12</sup>

McClain: “It is not for men to choose whether or not they will be under the rule of the Universal Kingdom. Whether they like it or not, they are already under it (Ps. 75:4–7).”<sup>13</sup>

Mediatorial kingdom: “The Mediatorial Kingdom may be defined tentatively as: (a) the rule of God through a divinely chosen representative who not only speaks and acts for God but also represents the people before God; (b) a rule which has especial reference to the earth; and (c) having as its mediatorial ruler one who is always a member of the human race.”<sup>14</sup>

## 5. The Relationship Between the Kingdom and the Covenants of God

Gentry and Wellum: “Kingdom through covenant is our overall proposal for what is central to the Bible’s narrative plot structure.”<sup>15</sup>

Covenants are the ‘backbone’: “We view the covenants as theologically significant and as the backbone to Scripture’s entire storyline.”<sup>16</sup>

Pentecost: “God’s kingdom program [is] the outworking of His eternal and unconditional covenants.”<sup>17</sup>

Vlach: “The covenants are the instruments through which the kingdom program unfolds.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>15</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, Second Edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 34.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 26.

## 6. The Kingdom of God and the Storyline of the Bible

Vlach: *“The Bible’s storyline shows how the kingdom created goes to the kingdom fallen, which then leads to the kingdom restored.”*

1. The kingdom is present with creation as God the King of creation tasks His image-bearer, man, to rule and subdue His creation.
2. The fall marks man’s failure to rule God’s creation; both God’s image-bearers (humans) and the creation come under the devastating effects of the fall.
3. The promise plan guarantees the seed of the woman will eventually succeed over the power behind the serpent (Satan); the fall will be reversed and man will effectively rule over creation.
4. Jesus the King brings redemption through His atonement, and His death is the basis for the kingdom and reconciliation of all things.
5. With the restoration of all things God’s kingdom plan is fulfilled as Jesus successfully reigns over the earth; this kingdom merges into the perfect kingdom of the Father.<sup>19</sup>

McClain: *“For it is in this Kingdom that the Father’s eternal purpose in the incarnate Son shall be certainly and completely fulfilled. This reign of God arises out of His own sovereign nature, was reflected in the “dominion” bestowed by God upon the first Adam, was forfeited quickly by reason of the sin of man, has been restored judicially in the Last Adam, will be realised on earth in the final age of human history, and reaches out endlessly beyond history where we behold a throne which, as John explains, is ‘the throne of God and of the Lamb’ (Rev. 22:3).”<sup>20</sup>*

## 7. Kingdom through Covenants

	Abrahamic Covenant	Mosaic Covenant	Priestly Covenant	Deuteronomomic Covenant	Davidic Covenant	New Covenant
Nation	X	X		X	X	X
Seed	X				X	X
Land	X	X		X	X	X
Blessing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kingdom	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:3–14; 22:14–19	Exod 19–24	Num 25:10–13; 1 Sam 2:35; Jer 33:17–18; Ezek 44:10–15; Mal 2:4–5	Deut 27–30	2 Sam 7:8–16; 1 Chron 17:7–14; Pss 2; 72; 89; 102	Jer 31:27–40

\* Material in this section taken from William D. Barrick, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 173–192.

<sup>19</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 5.

### **Abrahamic Covenant—**

Nation: "I will make you a great nation" (Gen 12:2).  
Seed: "count the stars... So shall your descendants be" (Gen 15:5).  
Land: "To your descendants I have given this land" (Gen 15:18).  
Blessing: "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (12:3).  
Kingdom: "your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies" (22:17).

### **Mosaic Covenant—**

Nation: "you shall be to Me... a holy nation" (Exod 19:6).  
Land: "that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you" (Exod 20:12).  
Blessing: "He will love you and bless you and multiply you... You shall be blessed above all peoples" (Deut 7:13–14).  
Kingdom: "and you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6).

### **Priestly Covenant—**

Blessing: "My covenant of peace" (Num 25:12).  
Kingdom: "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before me" (Jer 33:17–18).

### **Deuteronomic Covenant—**

Nation: "that He may establish you today as His people" (Deut 29:13).  
Land: "in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you" (Deut 28:11).  
Blessing: "The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand" (Deut 28:12).  
Kingdom: "The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above..." (Deut 28:13).

### **Davidic Covenant—**

Nation: "That you should be ruler over My people Israel" (2 Sam 7:8).  
Seed: "I will raise up your descendant after you" (2 Sam 7:12); "your house... shall endure before Me forever" (7:16).  
Land: "I will also appoint a place for My people Israel" (2 Sam 7:10).  
Blessing: "let men bless themselves by him; Let all nations call him blessed" (Ps 72:17).  
Kingdom: "your kingdom shall endure before Me forever" (2 Sam 7:16).

### **New Covenant—**

Nation: "Shall [not] cease from being a nation before Me forever" (Jer 31:36).  
Seed: "I will sow... with the seed of man" (Jer 31:27); "the offspring of Israel shall [not] cease" (31:36).  
Land: "The city shall be rebuilt for the LORD" (Jer 31:38); "it shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever" (31:40).  
Blessing: "I will put My law within them... I will forgive" (Jer 31:33–34).  
Kingdom: "the city will be rebuilt for the LORD... And the whole valley of the dead bodies... and all the fields... shall be holy to the LORD" (Jer 31:38–40)."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The reference is to the building of Jerusalem as the capital city of the Messianic kingdom.

## INTRODUCING THE COVENANTS: NOAHIC AND PRIESTLY COVENANTS

Covenants are the means by which God will establish His Kingdom:  
*“Covenants are central to God’s plans and constitute the vehicles through which God’s kingdom purposes unfold.”*<sup>1</sup>

MacArthur and Mayhue: *“The means for restoring God’s mediatorial kingdom on earth would come through four eternal and unconditional biblical covenants—the Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants”* (852).

Therefore, it is important to study the biblical covenants:  
*“We can’t truly understand the Scriptures if we don’t understand the covenants God made with his people.”*<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Understanding the Biblical concept of a ‘covenant’

#### Definition of ‘covenant’:

Schreiner: *“Covenant can be defined as follows: a covenant is a chosen relationship in which two parties make binding promises to each other”* (13).

MacArthur and Mayhue: *“A covenant is a formal agreement or treaty between two parties with obligations and regulations”* (870).

Busenitz: *“Covenant in the OT essentially incorporates a legally binding obligation.”*<sup>3</sup>

Used in two ways—

- i. A covenant which represents an agreement between two parties in which there is basic equality. Both sides enter into the treaty voluntarily, resulting in a partnership relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 870.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World*, ed. Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Irvin A. Busenitz, “Introduction to the Biblical Covenants: The Noahic Covenant and the Priestly Covenant,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (1999): 175.

Eg. David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:3–4), Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:54), Israel and the Canaanites (Exod 23:32; 34:12, 15), marriage (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14), international trade agreements (1 Kgs 20:34).

ii. A covenant which represents an agreement between two parties in which there is not equality. An arrangement imposed by a superior on subordinates. It usually designates an agreement made *to* or *for*, not *with*, the subordinate, depicting a legally binding promise which one party makes toward another.

Eg, Joshua 9; 1 Sam 11:1–2.

Most often a legally binding promise made by God toward men.

Busenitz: “Men do not have [equality] with God. Thus in the covenants of God, it is God alone who sets forth the conditions” (176).

### **Covenants and conditions:**

*“Conditionality was an integral aspect of every bilateral covenant. Failure of one of the parties to carry out the specified conditions rendered the agreement null and void. Unilateral covenants, on the other hand, wherein the Lord is the sole party responsible to carry out its obligations, are unconditional, depending totally on His faithfulness for their fulfillment. Scripture gives five of these covenants: the Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly (or Levitical), Davidic, and the New” (Busenitz, 180).*

### **Covenants not found in Scripture:**

*“Some theologians assert that the biblical covenants should be understood through theologically derived covenants. Covenant theology affirms three such covenants: (1) the covenant of works, (2) the covenant of grace, and (3) the covenant of redemption. While there may be certain truths associated with these theological covenants, such as God having a salvation plan from eternity and God working with his people on the basis of grace after the fall of Adam, these are not actual covenants found in the Bible” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 870).*

## 2. Noahic Covenant (Genesis 6:17–22; 8:20–22; 9:8–17)

**Overview:** *“In the Noahic Covenant, God showed His gracious mercy toward all mankind, both redeemed and unredeemed, causing it to rain on the just and the unjust and assuring the ongoing, uninterrupted cycle of seasons. In it He demonstrated His unwillingness to allow the sinfulness of man to derail His plan set forth in Genesis 3:15...”* (Busenitz, 182)

*“The Noahic covenant promised stability of nature so God’s kingdom purposes could play out in history”* (MacArthur & Mayhue, 852).

*“It could be called the ‘covenant of preservation’ since God instituted it to preserve human beings from destruction.... The covenant doesn’t promise universal salvation, but it does guarantee universal preservation.”* (Schreiner, 31, 35).

**Recipients:** Noah and his descendants (all humanity), as well as earthly creation.

**Sign:** Rainbow.

**Conditionality:** The Noahic covenant is an unconditional and eternal covenant still in effect today.

**Promise:** *“Two aspects stand preeminent in the promise made to Noah—the essence of the promise and the extent of the promise. God promises that ‘all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth’ (Gen 9:11). Though the two phrases are essentially parallel, the former focuses more specifically on physical life (both human and animal) while the latter focuses on the destruction of the earth itself. Floods on a smaller scale may destroy many and cause considerable devastation, but never again will He permit worldwide destruction by means of a flood”* (Busenitz, 185).

Several developments stem from the Noahic covenant:

- (1) it guarantees stability of nature (Gen. 8:22);
- (2) Noah is told to multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 9:1, 7), a reissuing of the command first given to Adam (Gen. 1:28);
- (3) God causes animals, birds, and fish to fear man (Gen. 9:2);
- (4) animals become food for man just like the plants were at creation (Gen. 9:3–4);
- (5) it affirms the dignity of man as God’s image bearer even after the fall of mankind and makes provision for capital punishment as the punishment for those who murder an image bearer of God (Gen. 9:6);
- (6) God promises never to destroy the world by water again (Gen. 9:15).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, ed., *Essential Christian Doctrine: A Handbook on Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 448.

*“Despite the depth of human wickedness, human beings are still made in God’s image, and God continues to bless them as they are fruitful and multiply on the earth. The flood testifies to what human beings deserve on account of wickedness, and it is a type of the final judgment to come (Matt. 24:36–41; 2 Pet. 2:5). The bow in the clouds, the sign of the covenant, testifies that God has withdrawn his weapons of war, that he will preserve the world until redemption is accomplished. God will not wipe out the world every few years and start over. The covenant with Noah doesn’t provide redemption, but the preservation of creation is the context in which redemption will be realised” (Schreiner, 39–41).*

### **3. Priestly Covenant (Numbers 25:10–13)**

**Overview:** A perpetual priesthood as a reward for Phinehas’ zeal in executing judgment, atoning for Israel’s sin.

*“In the Priestly Covenant, God promised the perpetual priesthood of the line of Phinehas that carries all the way through to serving in the Lord’s earthly millennial temple” (Busenitz, 182).*

**Recipients:** Phinehas and descendants.

**Sign:** None.

**Conditionality:** The Priestly covenant is an unconditional and eternal covenant still in effect today.

**Promise:** *“The promise made with Phinehas is said to be a ‘covenant of peace’ (Num 25:12). The Hebrew construction is unusual, making understanding difficult. It possibly denotes the peace made through Phinehas’ atoning action, causing the plague to be halted” (Busenitz, 188).*

*“With the priestly covenant of Numbers 25, God promised a perpetual priesthood in the line of Phinehas that would continue all the way through the existence of the Lord’s earthly millennial temple.... The genealogical line of Phinehas will continue into the millennial kingdom through Zadok (1 Chron. 6:50–53). Ezekiel indicates that the only priests who will be permitted to minister in the millennial temple will be those of the line of Zadok (Ezek. 44:15; 48:11). Non-Zadokian priests will be prohibited from the priestly office because of past idolatrous activity (Ezek. 44:10)” (MacArthur, 450).*

## ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

### 1. Biblical references: Genesis 12:1–3; 15:7–21; Genesis 22:15–18

The covenant is stated or reaffirmed at least eight times in Genesis 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–21; 22:15–18; 26:2–5, 24; 28:13–17; 35:10–12.

### 2. Overview

John F. Walvoord: “It is recognised by all serious students of the Bible that the covenant with Abraham is one of the important and determinative revelations of Scripture. It furnishes the key to the entire Old Testament and reaches for its fulfilment into the New.”<sup>1</sup>

Keith H. Essex: “The Abrahamic Covenant undergirds the totality of the biblical revelation.”<sup>2</sup>

The Moody Handbook of Theology: “The Abrahamic covenant is paramount to a proper understanding of the kingdom concept and is foundational to Old Testament theology.”<sup>3</sup>

Robert Saucy: “In the New Testament as in the Old, the Abrahamic promise is the foundation for all the other promises.”<sup>4</sup>

Biblical Doctrine: “The Noahic covenant is the initial platform for God’s purposes, yet the Abrahamic covenant details how God plans to save people and restore all things.”<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Recipients: Abraham and his descendants or “seed”

### 4. Sign: Circumcision

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Keith H. Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (1999): 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Jim Vincent and Allan Sholes, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 55.

<sup>4</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 49.

<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 872.

**5. Conditionality:** The Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional and eternal covenant still in effect today.

Blaising and Bock: “*Studies on the form of the Abrahamic covenant indicate that it is a grant covenant rather than a bilateral contract.... As such, the grant covenant is unconditional, for it guarantees the gift to the master’s servant and his heirs.*”<sup>6</sup>

Think about it: “If the Abrahamic Covenant were conditional, then the coming of the Redeemer and the provision of salvation were dependent upon the obedience of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the people of Israel.”<sup>7</sup>

A unilateral, unconditional covenant does not, however, exclude the recipient from obligations of obedience and loyalty to his master.

This is sometimes confused for conditionality in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Blaising and Bock: “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” (133–134).

## **6. Promise:**

From the beginning in Genesis 12:1–3, the blessing to Abraham is presented as a collection of promises:

- » God will bless Abraham (Gen. 12:2; 22:17)
- » Abraham will mediate God’s blessing to others (to all nations) (Gen. 12:2–3; 18:18; 22:18)
- » He will also mediate God’s curse (Gen. 12:3)
- » Abraham’s name will be great (Gen. 12:2)
- » He will become a great nation (Gen. 12:2; 18:18)
- » God will give to him and to his descendants the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7; 13:14–17; 15:7–21; 17:8)
- » Abraham will have innumerable descendants (Gen. 13:16; 15:4–7; 17:4–7, 15–21; 22:17)
- » This covenant will be established with Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 17:7, 19, 21)
- » God will be the God of Abraham and his descendants, and they will be His people (Gen. 17:7–8)

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<sup>6</sup> Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 132.

<sup>7</sup> Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1990), 67.

God's promises in the Abrahamic covenant are typically grouped into three main categories.

There are two views of how to group the promises:

- » (1) land, (2) seed, and (3) blessing.
- » (1) personal, (2) national, and (3) universal.

### Land, Seed, Blessing

#### 1. Land (Gen. 12:1):

- » God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to a land that He would give him (Gen. 12:1).
- » The promise is reiterated in Genesis 13:14–18.
- » The dimensions are given in Genesis 15:18–21.
- » The land aspect is also expanded in Deuteronomy 30:1–10.

#### 2. Seed/ descendants (Gen. 12:2):

- » God promised Abraham that He would make a great nation out of him.
- » Though seventy-five and childless (Gen. 12:4), he was promised many descendants.
- » The promise is amplified in Genesis 17:6 where God promised that nations and kings would descend from Abraham.
- » The promise is expanded by the Davidic covenant and fulfilled by the Messiah's kingdom rule from David's throne.

#### 3. Blessing and redemption (Gen. 12:3):

- » God promised to bless Abraham and the families of the earth through him.
- » The promise is amplified in the new covenant and has to do with both spiritual blessing and redemption for Israel and all the Gentile nations.

### Personal, National, Universal

#### 1. Personal promises to Abraham:

- » God promised to bless Abraham and to make him a blessing to others (Gen. 12:2),
- » to make his name great (12:2),
- » to give him many physical descendants (13:16; 15:4–5; 17:6),
- » to make him the father of a multitude of nations (17:4–5),
- » to give him the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession (13:14–15, 17; 15:7; 17:8),
- » and to bless those who blessed Abraham and curse those who cursed him (12:3).

## 2. National promises concerning Israel:

- » God promised to make a great nation of Abraham's physical descendants (12:2),
- » to give the land of Canaan from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates to Abraham's physical descendants forever (12:7; 13:14–15; 15:18–21; 17:8),
- » and to give the Abrahamic Covenant to his descendants for an everlasting covenant (17:7, 19).

## 3. Universal promises affecting all peoples of the world:

- » God promised that all families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's physical line of descent (12:3; 22:18; 28:14).
- » Great spiritual blessing has been made available to all peoples through Jesus Christ and the Jews.

## 7. Significance

The Abrahamic covenant introduces the principle of kingdom:

Genesis 18:18—"Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation..."

"The word nation indicates a people with an organised governmental structure, which we could call a 'political entity.' In other words, God promised Abraham a kingdom."<sup>8</sup>

The Abrahamic covenant introduces the principle of mediation:

"A principle of mediation has been introduced, beginning with Abraham and transferring to his descendants who are selected and accepted by God" (Blaising and Bock, 139).

The Abrahamic covenant introduces the God's intention to bless humanity:

"The Noahic and Abrahamic covenants reveal aspects of the overall plan of redemption and set forth a foundational structure for the subsequent relationship between God, humanity, and life on the earth. This foundation is established in an unconditional divine determination to bless" (Blaising and Bock, 140).

The Abrahamic covenant always had a universal focus:

"Noteworthy... is that the covenant with Abraham was never focused solely on Israel; from the beginning there was concern that the entire world would experience blessing" (Schreiner, 46).

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, ed. Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 43.

## 8. Fulfilment

Partial historic fulfilment:

- » God blessed Abraham by giving him the land (Gen. 13:14–17);
- » God blessed Abraham spiritually (Gen. 13:8, 18; 14:22, 23; 21:22);
- » God gave him numerous descendants (Gen. 22:17; 49:3–28).

Future fulfilment:

1. Israel as a nation will possess the *land* in the future.
  - » Numerous Old Testament passages anticipate the future blessing of Israel and her possession of the land as promised to Abraham.
  - » Ezekiel envisions a future day when Israel is restored to the land (Ezek. 20:33–37, 40–42; 36:1–37:28).
2. Israel as a *nation* will be converted, forgiven, and restored (Rom. 11:25–27).
3. Israel will repent and receive the *forgiveness* of God in the future (Zech. 12:10–14).
  - » The Abrahamic covenant finds its ultimate fulfilment in connection with the return of Messiah to rescue and bless His people Israel.
  - » It is through the nation Israel that God promised to bless the nations of the world.
  - » That ultimate blessing will be fulfilled in forgiveness of sins and the Messiah's glorious kingdom reign on earth

(Moody Handbook of Theology, 56).

Genesis 15:18: “On that day Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your seed I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.’”



## MOSAIC COVENANT

### 1. Biblical references: Exodus 19–24

Exodus 19:5-6, “So now then, if you will indeed listen to My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

### 2. Overview

We must recognise the importance of the Mosaic covenant in both the Old and New Testaments:

Paul House: “There is no way to describe adequately the canonical implications of Exodus 19–24. Everyone from Moses (Deut 5:6–21), to Jeremiah (Jer 7:1–15), to Jesus (Mt 5–7), to Peter (1 Pet 2:9), and every other biblical writer who has anything to say about covenant, morality and relationship to God reflects directly or indirectly on this passage.”<sup>1</sup>

William Bellshaw: “Since the majority of the Old Testament covers the time the Jews were living under the Mosaic Covenant, this agreement is exceedingly significant. A proper understanding of the Old Testament is dependent upon a knowledge of the way of life God gave His people.”<sup>2</sup>

We must recognise that the Mosaic covenant did not replace the Abrahamic covenant:

Saucy: “Although the Sinai covenant, like the covenants that followed, is related to the Abrahamic promises, we should note a fundamental difference. The Davidic and new Covenants... are basically elaborations of provisions of the Abrahamic promises.... The Sinai covenant, by contrast, being the initial fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, was added alongside that promise to provide the structure and conditions for its temporal enjoyment...”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998) 117.

<sup>2</sup> William G. Bellshaw, *Clarifying God's Covenants*, 48, cited in William D. Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” *Master's Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (1999): 212.

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 59, fn. 1.

The format of the covenant in Exodus:

Historical Prologue	Exod 19:1–4
Preamble	Exod 19:5–6
Stipulations	Exod 20:3–23:19
Provision for Reading	Exod 24:4–7
Blessings & Curses	Exod 23:20–23

**3. Recipients:** The nation of Israel

**4. Sign:** Sabbath

Exodus 31:13, *“But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely keep My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am Yahweh who makes you holy.’”*

**5. Conditionality:**

While the Mosaic is the most conditional of all the covenants, it is ultimately based on the unconditional promise of God in the Abrahamic covenant:

Barrick: “It is true that the Mosaic Covenant was the most conditional of all the biblical covenants. Of all the covenants, it dealt specifically with how the people of God should live. The fulfilment of the promises and blessings of any of the covenants for any particular individual or generation was dependent upon their obedience to God’s revelation. Disobedience annulled the blessings of God for that individual or generation in his/her/its own time, but disobedience did not invalidate the unconditional terms of the covenant.”<sup>4</sup>

The ‘conditionality’ of the covenant refers to the obligations of loyalty and obedience (i.e. faith):

Barrick: “Obedience to the Mosaic Covenant would be the means by which the Israelites would manifest their faith in the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Jas 2:14–26). The nation did not need to keep the Law to be freed from their bondage; they were freed from their bondage that they might live for God in the midst of the crooked and perverse Gentile nations” (223).

The ‘conditionality’ of the covenant is expressed in the blessing and cursing language:

Barrick: “The blessing and cursing in the Mosaic Covenant were the divinely appointed evidence of Yahweh’s faithfulness to do exactly what He said He would do. Blessing and cursing were initiated by promise, and implemented by legislation” (227).

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<sup>4</sup> Barrick, TMSJ, 222.

## 6. Promise:

The blessings of the Mosaic covenant (Lev. 26; Deut. 6–11; 28) restate the promises of the Abrahamic covenant:

1. God will bless them (Lev. 26:4–12; Deut. 7:13–15; 28:3–12)
2. God will multiply them (Lev. 26:9; Deut. 6:3; 8:1; 28:11)
3. God will give them this land (Lev. 26:5; Deut. 6:3; 8:1; 9:4; 28:11)
4. God will make them a great nation (Deut. 7:14; 28:1, 3)
5. God will be their God and they will be His people (Lev. 26:11–12; Deut. 7:6–10; 28:9–10)
6. God will confirm His covenant with these particular descendants of the patriarchs (Lev. 26:9)<sup>5</sup>

The immediate purpose of the Mosaic covenant was Israel's worship of Yahweh and their deliverance from Egypt.

### Worshipping Yahweh:

Exodus 3:12, *“And He said, ‘Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God at this mountain.’”*

Barrick: “It is obvious that the covenant was not to be the means of salvation. Participants in the covenant at Sinai were already worshipers of Yahweh. The works specified in the covenant's stipulations were never designed to bring anyone into a salvific relationship to God. The stipulations were designed to enhance the believer's worship and service. Obedience to the laws of Moses would bring blessings to God's people, but not salvation from sin (cf. Rom 3:20)” (219).

### Deliverance from Egypt:

Exodus 3:16-17, *“I indeed care about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”*

Exodus 19:4, *“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I lifted you up on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.”*

Deuteronomy 4:37, *“Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their seed after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power.”*

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<sup>5</sup> Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 141–142.

## 7. Significance

- a. The Law was a means of administration, not salvation.

Salvation has never been by means of keeping the Law:

Romans 3:20, *“By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”*

Biblical Doctrine: “The Mosaic covenant was a gracious covenant. It was not a means of salvation but the God-intended way for Israel to show its love and commitment to God.”<sup>6</sup>

The Law was the means of governing God’s people as a nation:

“The Mosaic covenant is an administration of law in that the Lord bound individuals and tribes together into one nation by detailed regulations. The law was God’s means of shaping Israel into a ‘counter-community.’ Yahweh had consecrated Israel as a witness to the nations by showing them in the law how to mirror his perfections. The legal system of any other people reflects the culture of that people. Through God’s law, however, the godly came to know how to reflect God’s love, compassion, fidelity, and other perfections.”<sup>7</sup>

- b. The Law is a single, inseparable unit.

Barrick: “The essential unity of the Law of Moses is clear in the Scriptures (Jas 2:10; Gal 5:3). Dividing the Law into moral, civil/social, and ceremonial/religious is really an artificiality unsupported by the overwhelming evidence of Scripture” (228).

- c. The Law has been replaced by a new law.

Biblical Doctrine: “The end of the Mosaic covenant as a rule of life occurred with the death of Jesus because he fulfilled the demands of the covenant and established the new covenant with his blood (Luke 22:20)” (874–875).

Ephesians 2:14-15, *“He Himself... broke down the dividing wall of the partition by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, the Law of commandments contained in ordinances...”*

Hebrews 8:13, *“When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”*

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<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 874.

<sup>7</sup> Willem A. Vangemeren, “The Non-Theonomic Reformed View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan Counterpoints Collection (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 28.

d. The Law is not binding on Christians

Romans 6:14-15, *"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!"*

Romans 10:4, *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."*

Galatians 5:18, *"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law."*

1 Corinthians 9:20, *"To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews. To those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law."*

Biblical Doctrine: "The Mosaic covenant reveals unchanging attributes of and truths about God's character, which is the basis of his required principles for life" (875)

## 8. Fulfilment

Blaising and Bock: *"As a bilateral treaty, the Mosaic covenant can be said to be fulfilled successively in the history of each generation of the descendants of the patriarchs.... In each generation, God manifests the blessing or the curse (or aspects of both) in response to the faith and obedience (or unbelief and disobedience) of the people"* (150).

Jeremiah 6:19, *"Hear, O earth: behold, I am bringing evil on this people, the fruit of their plans, because they have not given heed to My words, and as for My law, they have rejected it also."*

Jeremiah 7:9-10, *"Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear while lying, and burn incense to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—that you may do all these abominations?"*

There is some debate among theologians as to whether the Mosaic law was abolished or merely amended by the new covenant:

*"A change did take place which prepared the way for the subsequent covenant, but it was not an abolishing of the entire Mosaic Covenant"* (Barrick, 231).

A final fulfilment of the Mosaic covenant takes place in Jesus Christ through the new covenant.

## DAVIDIC COVENANT

### 1. Biblical references: 2 Samuel 7:8-16; 1 Chronicles 17:7-14

2 Samuel 23:5, *“Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me...”*

Psalms 89:33-37—

<sup>33</sup> *But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness.*

<sup>34</sup> *My covenant I will not profane, nor will I alter what comes forth from My lips.*

<sup>35</sup> *Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.*

<sup>36</sup> *His seed shall endure forever And his throne as the sun before Me.*

<sup>37</sup> *It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful.*

Psalms 132:12, *“If your sons keep My covenant and My testimony which I will teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forever.”*

### 2. Overview

Grisanti: *“In his covenant with David, Yahweh presents David with two categories of promises: those that find realisation during David’s lifetime and those that find fulfilment after his death.”*<sup>1</sup>

The kingdom theme of Scripture: *“The kingdom concept reaches its zenith in the Davidic covenant, which predicts the future millennial reign of David’s greater Son, the Messiah.”*<sup>2</sup>

**3. Recipients:** David and his royal descendants.

**4. Sign:** There was no covenant sign.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael A. Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (1999): 236–237.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Jim Vincent and Allan Sholes, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 65.

## 5. Conditionality:

Grisanti: “In establishing this covenant with David Yahweh places no obligations on David as it relates to the enactment or perpetuation of the covenant. In that sense the Davidic Covenant is unilateral and, consequently, unconditional. Any conditions attached to this covenant concern only the question of which king or kings will enjoy certain provisions laid out by the covenant” (240–241).

Observe: David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12) closely aligns with the Davidic covenant which demonstrates the unconditionality of the covenant.

Similarly, King Solomon’s covenant treachery with idolatry that led to the division of the kingdom did not represent the failure of the Davidic covenant.

Waltke: “This arrangement of the biblical text demonstrates that “the beneficiaries’ darkest crimes do not annul the covenants of divine commitment.”<sup>3</sup>

## 6. Promise:

The provisions of the Davidic Covenant include the following items:

- i. David is to have a child, yet to be born, who will succeed him and establish his kingdom.
- ii. This son (Solomon), instead of David, will build the temple.
- iii. The throne of his kingdom will be established forever.
- iv. The throne will not be taken away from him (Solomon) even though his sins justify God’s discipline.
- v. David’s house, throne, and kingdom will be established forever.<sup>4</sup>

In his covenant with David, Yahweh presents David with two categories of promises: those that find realisation during David’s lifetime and those that find fulfilment after his death.

Promises that find realisation during David’s lifetime (7:9-11a)

**a. Great name (v. 9):** In the same manner that Yahweh promised Abraham (Gen 12:2), He promises to make David’s name great.

2 Samuel 7:8, “So now, thus you shall say to My servant David, ‘Thus says Yahweh of hosts, “I Myself took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel.””’”

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 131.

<sup>4</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God’s Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises throughout History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995), 141–142.

**b. A place for the people (v. 10):** The “place” that Yahweh will appoint for Israel clearly refers to the promised land, but also probably highlights the idea of permanence and security.

Genesis 15:18, “On that day Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your seed I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.’”

**c. Rest (v. 11):** Even after all of David’s military and political accomplishments, there was a level of security and prosperity that was not yet experienced, leaving a rest that is still future.

2 Samuel 7:1, “Now it happened when the king inhabited his house, and Yahweh had given him rest on every side from all his enemies.”

Promises that find realisation after David’s death (7:11b-16)

**a. A house (v. 11):** Although David desired to build Yahweh a “house” (temple), instead it would be the Yahweh who would build David a “house” (dynasty).

The dynasty of David ensures the preservation of his royal line.

2 Samuel 6 provides the theological preparation for 2 Samuel 7.

Grisanti: “The divinely approved movement of the ark to the city of Jerusalem represents God’s choice of Jerusalem as the future site for the Temple, i.e., a “house” for the ark of the covenant. The presence of God, which rests on the ark of the covenant, will serve as a tangible reminder of Yahweh’s kingship over Israel” (238).

**b. A seed (v. 12):** The “seed” refers to Solomon, to all the royal descendants of David, and ultimately to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Sonship: “This language reveals the intimacy which will exist between the covenant king and the Lord, and it also shows the security of that relationship.”<sup>5</sup>

Psalm 2:7, “I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’”

Psalm 89:26-27, “He will call to Me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.’ I also shall make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.”

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<sup>5</sup> Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 160.

Sinful seed: “God’s promise to raise up a descendant is unconditional. But a continuous, uninterrupted reign is not. That is conditioned upon the faithfulness of the Davidic kings” (Blaising and Bock, 164).

Pentecost: “The only necessary feature is that the lineage cannot be lost, not that the throne be occupied continuously” (147).

**c. A kingdom (v. 13):** The perpetual rule of a Davidic descendant over the realm of Israel.

Various passages in the Pentateuch anticipated that Israel would one day have a king (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11; Deut 17:14–20) and constitute a kingdom (Num 24:7, 19).

Grisanti: “This kingdom which God promises to establish through David does not replace the theocracy. It is regarded as God’s throne/ kingdom (1 Chr 28:5; 2 Chr 9:8; 13:8). In fact, the Davidic ruler is called ‘the Lord’s anointed’ (1 Sam 24:6; 2 Sam 19:21)” (239–240).

“Forever” (v. 13, 16): These references “[vault] this portion of God’s oath beyond the time frame of Solomon’s reign” (Grisanti, 240).

It is clear that there is an ultimate fulfilment beyond Solomon.

## 7. Significance

Grisanti: “Throughout the OT God is weaving a beautiful covenant tapestry, weaving each new covenant into the fabric of the former covenants” (245).

### a. The Davidic covenant’s link to the Abrahamic covenant

Blaising and Bock: “On the one hand the Davidic covenant is part of the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant. A blessed king from the line of David is one way in which the promise to bless descendants of Abraham will manifest itself. On the other hand, the Davidic covenant provides the means by which the Abrahamic blessing will be fulfilled for all descendants. The blessing for the many will be mediated by the rulership of the one, the king” (166).

McClain: “This covenant consisted of a reaffirmation of the regal terms of the original Abrahamic covenant; with the further provision that these covenanted rights will now attach permanently to the historic house and succession of David; and also that by God’s grace these rights, even if historically interrupted for a season, will at last in a future kingdom be restored to the nation in perpetuity with no further possibility of interruption.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), 156.

Merrill: “The Davidic dynasty would remain intact forever because God had pledged to produce through Abraham a line of kings that would find its historical locus in Israel, but would have ramifications extending far beyond Israel.”<sup>7</sup>

#### b. The Davidic covenant’s link to the Mosaic covenant

Grisanti: “The royal psalms depict the king as conducting his rule in accordance with the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant” (248).

Dumbrell: “Davidic kingship is thus to reflect in the person of the occupant of the throne of Israel and as representative of the nation as a whole, the values which the Sinai covenant had required of the nation.”<sup>8</sup>

Grisanti: “The function of the God-fearing king was to lead Israel in keeping covenant and in relying on God for deliverance... The Davidic ruler should epitomise the standards of the Mosaic Covenant, even though his conformity or lack of conformity to those standards does not determine whether or not Yahweh will one day bring to realisation the provisions of the Davidic Covenant” (249).

## 8. Fulfilment

Matthew 1:1, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

Biblical Doctrine: “The Davidic covenant contains promises that were fulfilled with Jesus’s first coming, while other promises await fulfilment at his second coming. Jesus’s manifestation as King in the line of David is a first-coming fulfilment. Those who believe in him are positionally transferred to the kingdom (Col. 1:13). The spreading of messianic salvation to Gentiles is also a fulfilment of the Davidic covenant (Acts 15:14–18).

New covenant fulfilment: “The new covenant blessing would be exemplified in the life of a Davidic king under whose rule and through whose mediation the blessings would come to the Israel of faith—that remnant of physical Israel which trusts in God—and to all those of the nations who trust in God through this king and thus come to constitute those nations who are blessed forever ‘in Him’” (Blaising and Bock, 173).

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<sup>7</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 185.

<sup>8</sup> William J. Dumbrell, “The Davidic Covenant,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 39, no. 2 (May–August 1980): 46.

## NEW COVENANT

### 1. Biblical references: Jeremiah 31:31–34

### 2. Overview

Biblical Doctrine: “The new covenant is an unconditional and eternal covenant whereby God enables and empowers his people to serve him willingly and to remain in his blessings.”<sup>1</sup>

Schreiner: “The new covenant represents the culmination of God’s saving work among his people. God regenerates his people by his Spirit and renews their hearts so that they obey him. He is their God, and they are his people. The basis for such renewal is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for by his atoning death and resurrection complete forgiveness of sins is achieved. Hence, a new and bold access to God is obtained which wasn’t available in the old covenant.”<sup>2</sup>

Decker: “The New Covenant, prophesied in the Old Testament to be made with Israel, was ratified at the Cross and implemented as a replacement of the Mosaic Covenant.”<sup>3</sup>

The term “new covenant” implies the inadequacy of the old, i.e. Mosaic, covenant.

Saucy: “The inadequacy of the old arrangement to bring mankind to righteous perfection precluded fulfilment. The new covenant will succeed where the old had failed. God will finally make his people perfect and bring them into the relationship with him for which they were originally created.”<sup>4</sup>

“In both the Old and New Testaments it is the provisions of the new covenant that ultimately provide the solution to the human problem of sin and bring those in the covenant into a final perfect fellowship with God as his sons and daughters” (Saucy, 111).

“The relationship promised is nothing less than a direct personal fellowship of God with humankind through his Spirit” (Saucy, 117).

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 878.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, ed. Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 118.

<sup>3</sup> Rodney J. Decker, “The Church’s Relationship to the New Covenant,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (1995): 454.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 119.

### 3. Recipients: Israel and Gentiles united to Christ (“in Christ”)

Pettegrew: “Even the blessings promised to Gentiles were routed through the nation of Israel. From the beginning of the covenant program, God promised Abraham that in him and his seed, ‘all the nations of the earth would be blessed’ (Gen 12:3; 22:18).”<sup>5</sup>

The primary text of the New Covenant makes it clear that it is made with Israel:

Jeremiah 31:31, “*Behold, days are coming, declares Yahweh, ‘when I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.’*”

The “problem” of Gentile inclusion in the New Covenant is solved by the concept of the “seed” in the Abrahamic Covenant:

Galatians 3:16, “*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.*”

Therefore, all who are “in Christ” are able to benefit from the New Covenant.

Examining Galatians 3:16 in greater detail:

There are two reasons why we should understand Paul to be using a contextual/literal interpretation of the Abrahamic Covenant in Galatians 3:16.<sup>6</sup>

First, the concept of “seed,” going back to Genesis 3, involves both a collective and individual sense.

Genesis 3:15, “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*”

Second, Paul is relying literally on the grammar of the Genesis verse he is referring to in Galatians 3:16.

Collins: “Genesis 22:18 seems to be the best candidate for Paul’s source here, because, of the Genesis ‘blessing’ texts that might lie behind the composite quotation of Galatians 3:8, it is the one that has the dative of σπέρμα. This, then, allows us to make sense of Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:16.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (1999): 260.

<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Vlach, *The Old in the New: Understanding How the New Testament Authors Quoted the Old Testament* (Woodlands, TX: Sun Valley, CA: Kress Biblical Resources; Master’s Seminary Press, 2021), 231–232.

<sup>7</sup> John C. Collins, “Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 54, no. 1 (2003): 86.

Vlach: "If Paul's use of 'seed' in Galatians 3:16 is a reference to Genesis 22:18, then Paul could be quite literal with his singular sense of seed. Applying the seed concept to a singular person (Jesus) is consistent with the literal meaning of Genesis 22:18" (234).

Gentry and Wellum: "Paul's argument in Galatians 3:16 that the text speaks of 'seed' and not 'seeds' appears to be based upon solid exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures."<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, by including the Gentiles who are "in Christ," God did not replace Israel as the recipients of the New Covenant, but rather expanded the promises so that the Gentiles would also participate in the blessings of the covenant.

Blaising and Bock: "The additional inclusion of some in the promise does not mean that the original recipients are thereby excluded. The expansion of promise need not mean the cancellation of earlier commitments God has made. The realisation of new covenant hope today for Gentiles does not mean that the promise made to Israel in Jeremiah 31 has been jettisoned."<sup>9</sup>

Decker: "The church, though not a formal partner of the New Covenant, participates in the covenant both as a subject of its rule of life and as a recipient of promised Abrahamic Covenant blessings for Gentiles that have come through the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ" (454).

"'Participation' is a better term to describe the present aspects as it both avoids replacement concepts (the church replacing Israel in fulfilling the covenant) and also explains the partial nature of the obedience evident in the experience of the church" (454).

Pettegrew: "For Israel the New Covenant promises her transformation through providing her a new heart, her final and permanent forgiveness, and the consummation of her relationship with the Lord. Through Israel God will also bless the Gentiles because of this covenant" (250).

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<sup>8</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, Second Edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 326.

<sup>9</sup> Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 103–104.

#### 4. Sign: Ordinance of communion/ the Lord's Supper

A core Covenantalist doctrine is that baptism is the sign of the covenant, and that this sign replaces the sign of circumcision.

However, the idea of baptism as the sign lacks the support of the New Testament:

Waymeyer: "It appears more accurate to see the Lord's Supper alone as the sign of the New Covenant and to see baptism as an initiatory rite given to the one who has become a member of the New Covenant. For this reason, to say that baptism has taken the place of circumcision as the sign of the covenant is to give baptism a role not explicitly ascribed to it in Scripture."<sup>10</sup>

#### 5. Conditionality: Unconditional and unilateral

Pettegrew: "The New Covenant, like the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants made with Israel, was declared everlasting and irrevocable, based on the promise of the sovereign, faithful God of the universe" (254).

#### 6. Promise:

God promised many things to the people of Israel in the New Covenant:

1. God promised regeneration. This would involve the giving of a new heart (a new inner control centre where the issues and direction of life are determined) and the new nature (a new favourable spirit or disposition toward God consisting of the law of God written in the heart) (Jer. 31:33; 32:39–40; Ezek. 36:26).
2. God promised forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25).
3. He pledged the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:27).
4. He guaranteed a universal knowledge of Yahweh among the people of Israel (Jer. 31:34). The context of this fourth promise indicated that God was referring to a personal experiential knowledge of Himself (the kind of knowledge which comes through a genuine salvation experience), not just a head knowledge of His existence.
5. God promised that Israel would obey Him and have a right attitude toward Him forever (Jer. 32:39–40; Ezek. 36:27; 37:23–24).
6. God promised many national blessings to the people of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Waymeyer, *A Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2008), 56–57.

<sup>11</sup> Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1990), 100.

The spiritual provisions of the New Covenant can be categorised as transformation, forgiveness, and relationship:<sup>12</sup>

### Transformation

Jeremiah 24:7, *“I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am Yahweh; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.”*

Ezekiel 11:19–20—

<sup>19</sup> *And I will give them one heart and give within them a new spirit. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,*

<sup>20</sup> *that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.*

Ezekiel 36:25–27—

<sup>25</sup> *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your idols.*

<sup>26</sup> *Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

<sup>27</sup> *I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to do My judgments.*

Does this mean that no saint under the Old Covenant was regenerate, or that none was able to keep the covenant?

Kent: “This does not mean that no Jew under the Mosaic Covenant had a transformed heart. What is being stated is that the New Covenant itself would provide this for every participant. Such was not the case with the Mosaic Covenant. Even though it was obviously possible to know God and have a transformed heart during OT times, the old covenant itself did not provide this. Many Jews lived under the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant and still died in unbelief. The New Covenant, however, guarantees regeneration to its beneficiaries.”<sup>13</sup>

Pettegrew: “Moses and the earlier writers were not teaching that a natural man was wholly capable of complete obedience to God. Instead, Moses taught that it was possible for an Old Testament saint with a new nature to keep successfully (though not perfectly) the provisions of the Old Covenant. Some saints such as Daniel did. Unfortunately, many Old Testament Israelites lived under the Old Covenant and were not regenerated, so they could not keep its requirements” (256).

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<sup>12</sup> Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” 255.

<sup>13</sup> Homer A. Kent, “The New Covenant and the Church,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6, no. 2 (1985): 294.

Pierce: “In contrast to the old-covenant model in which entrance into the community was through physical birth, the new-covenant community will be formed by spiritual birth. To state it differently, in contrast to Old Testament Israel where the remnant is sometimes represented by only ten percent of the nation (e.g. Isa 6:13), the new-covenant community will include only believers because that will be the criterion for entrance.”<sup>14</sup>

### Forgiveness

Jeremiah 31:34, “*And they will not teach again, each man his neighbour and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares Yahweh, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’*”

Pettegrew: “Above all else, the shed blood of the Son of God provided the means of final and permanent forgiveness. New Covenant forgiveness of sins is of a different nature than forgiveness of sins under the Old Covenant” (258).

### Relationship

Jeremiah 24:7, “*I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am Yahweh; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.*”

Jeremiah 31:33, “*But this is the covenant which I will cut with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares Yahweh: ‘I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’*”

Ezekiel 36:22–23—

<sup>22</sup> “*Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says Lord Yahweh, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations, to which you have come.*

<sup>23</sup> *I will prove the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am Yahweh,” declares Lord Yahweh, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.”*

The Lord thus promises that those in the New Covenant will be changed from the inside out, and thus “they will really be My people and I will really be their God.”<sup>15</sup>

Isaiah 44:5, “*This one will say, ‘I am Yahweh’s’; And this one will call on the name of Jacob; And this one will write on his hand, ‘Belonging to Yahweh,’ And will name Israel’s name with honour.*”

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<sup>14</sup> Ronald W. Pierce, “Covenant Conditionality and a Future for Israel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 1 (1994): 34.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Raitt, *Theology in Exile*, cited in Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” 258.

## 7. Fulfilment

Blaising and Bock: “We look forward to, “a future dispensation in which the new covenant will be completely fulfilled and its blessing fully received. All of the grant covenants will be fully realised at that time. The change of dispensation will occur at the descent of Jesus from heaven. New covenant blessing (and thus Abrahamic blessing) will be extended to the national and political dimensions of human existence as He realises His Davidic prerogative to personally rule the nations. The blessings of the indwelling Spirit and new heart will be completed with resurrection from death and perfection in holiness. The blessing on Him and in Him upon us all will be everlasting, confirming through redemption God’s plan of creation” (211).

Romans 11:33–36—

<sup>33</sup> *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!*

<sup>34</sup> *For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counsellor?*

<sup>35</sup> *Or who has first given to Him that it might be repaid to him?*

<sup>36</sup> *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*