

Heritage Bible Church

Biblical Covenants

Introduction

- I. Why should *every Christian* care about the biblical covenants?
 - A. The covenants God has made with humans structure God's purposes in creation and redemption.
 - B. They govern what God is doing in different eras of human history and how He is accomplishing His purposes through the people with whom He is in covenant.
 - C. Every Christian is a *participant* in a particular covenant (the New Covenant).
 - 1) To understand their *location* and *function* in redemptive history, Christians must understand the covenants and how they work together.
 - 2) Understanding the big picture overview of how God is working in human history and how Christians are a part of that should give shape and purpose to how they live their daily lives and should cause them to worship the one true God with whom they are in covenant.
 - D. **Goals of our study**
 - 1) **PURPOSEFUL OBEDIENT LIVING: Change daily living to be in line with God's working through the biblical covenants.**
 - 2) **GRATEFUL LOVING FAITHFUL WORSHIP: Stand in awe of and delight in the one true God Who is at work in history.**
- II. What is a "covenant"?
 - A. *A covenant is a solemn commitment to a particular relationship, guaranteeing promises or obligations undertaken by one or both parties, sealed with an implicit or explicit oath.*³
 - B. A covenant is a commitment to a relationship.
 - 1) The relationship may already exist prior to the making of the covenant but the covenant defines the relationship in a particular way.
 - 2) Because it is a commitment to a relationship, a covenant is more than a business contract.
 - 3) The relationship may be peer-to-peer or superior to inferior
 - 4) The relationship may be human-to-human, nation-to-nation, or God-to-human.
 - 5) The relationship may be based in mutual distrust (e.g. Jacob and Laban), on friendship (e.g. Jonathan and David), benevolence and grace (e.g. God and Abraham) or other motivations.

³ Adapted from Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, edited by D. A. Carson, Vol. 23, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007) 43.

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- C. A covenant guarantees promises or obligations.
- 1) The guarantee of the covenant relationship may rest solely on one party (unilateral) or on mutually fulfilled obligations by both parties (bilateral).
 - 2) Obligations may include protection, gifts, no trespassing policies, denial of certain activities, etc.
- D. Since a covenant is solemn, an oath is made to seal the solemn commitment.
- 1) The nature of the oath was negative in nature: "If I break my obligations or promises, then I am accepting upon myself such and such consequences."
 - 2) In the OT, this is clearly seen in God's covenant oath with Abraham where God's presence passed through animals divided in half.
 - i. By walking through the animals cut in half, a covenant participant was vowing, "If I break this covenant, may I be cut in half just like these animals."
 - ii. In the OT, this is why the action of creating a covenant is often described as "cutting a covenant."
- E. Marriage is the most familiar form of covenant today.
- 1) Marriage is spoken of as a covenant in the Scriptures (Prov 2:16-17, Mal 2:14) with God as the witness of the oaths taken in the marriage ceremony.
 - 2) It is instructive that in the OT and the NT, the marriage relationship is consistently used as a picture of the relationship between God and His people (cf. Hosea, Eph 5:22-33).
- F. Covenants often include signs.
- 1) Signs are markers designed to bring the covenant to remembrance to the covenant participants.
 - 2) Signs can be particular *objects* (e.g. a pile of stones or a wedding ring) or particular *actions* (e.g. circumcision)
- G. Loyally keeping the covenant is described as faithfulness and steadfast love⁴.
- III. What "biblical covenants" are we studying?
- A. There are dozens of covenants in the Scriptures (e.g. Jacob and Laban, Israel and the Gibeonites, David and Jonathan, the Abrahamic Covenant, etc.), but we will focus only on the God-to-human covenants.

⁴ In the Old Testament, "steadfast love" is a loyal covenant love and is translated in other English versions as "lovingkindness," "mercy," "faithful love," "faithfulness," or even simply "love."

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- B. In particular, we will examine the Noahic, Abrahamic, Israelite, Priestly, Davidic, and New covenants.
- C. All of these covenants between God and man are clearly made between a superior (King) to an inferior (servant).

IV. How we will study the biblical covenants

- A. God's covenants with men are consistent with one another and God's purposes in creation, are tightly interconnected for the implementation of God's redemptive purposes, and build on one another.
- B. Each successive covenant grows more specific in its application as God unfolds more of redemptive history.
- C. The covenants can be viewed as the rungs of a ladder, each in line with the last leading to the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes.



- D. We will study each covenant in turn, but we must ground our study in God's purposes in creation and redemption, and we must seek to see how each of the covenants connects with each other and God's redemptive plan.

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The Beginning: Creation, the Fall, and God's Redemptive Plan

- I. There is debate about whether the relationship between God and Adam and Eve at creation is a covenant.
- II. Whatever one's position, it is clear from God's act of creation, that Yahweh had a *solemn commitment* to and purpose for mankind.
 - A. Gen 1:26-31—The Triune God creates man in His image to have dominion over the earth.
 - 1) Image (like a statue)→live representative and display of God's kingship over everything (ancient near eastern kings used to do this to display their rule and authority in a location)
 - 2) "Be fruitful and multiply"→ Offspring are part of the mandate of exercising dominion so that God's image and His glory might be displayed throughout the whole of His empire.
 - 3) Gen 2:15 demonstrates that *dominion* does not mean *exploitation*.
 - 4) The mandate for dominion is a complementary venture between man and woman, reflecting the diversity and unity of the Trinity (Gen 1:27, Gen 2:18-25).
 - 5) It is interesting to note that marriage is a covenant relationship (as attested elsewhere in Scripture) instituted before the fall and is an often used picture of God's relationship with His people, a relationship that began with His first people: Adam and Eve.
 - B. The relationship that Yahweh instituted is one based in grace with resulting stipulations.
 - 1) The relationship is based on grace because man cannot enjoy the relationship without God graciously creating him to begin with!
 - 2) Gen 2:15-17 shows that even in this relationship of pure grace, mankind has commands to obey as a *result* (not the foundation) of the relationship Yahweh initiated.
 - C. Mankind in this relationship is a race of steward-kings under God's ultimate rule.
- III. God *resting* on the seventh day of creation punctuates the goodness, peace, and perfection of the created order.
- IV. Man violates the stipulations of His intimate relationship with God.
 - A. Man as a steward-king seeks to usurp Yahweh's throne as ultimate king after being incited by the Serpent (Gen 3:1-7).
 - B. Yahweh faithfully executes the curse He promised for disobedience—physical and spiritual death.
 - C. In Gen 3:14-15 the midst of the curse upon the Serpent, God by grace holds out a promise of redemption for mankind.

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- 1) A male seed/offspring *from the woman* will succeed where Adam failed and deal a death blow to the Serpent and his designs.
 - 2) Based on the Serpent's placement in the story, dealing him a death blow would bring humanity back to similar state before he stepped onto the scene to incite the Fall.
 - 3) This promise forms the foundation upon which the biblical covenants are grounded.
- D. Gen 3:21 shows that Yahweh is the one who graciously provides a covering for the consequences of sin through sacrifice so that mankind can still enjoy a relationship with God.
- V. The rest of redemptive history is God re-establishing the kingdom conditions of Gen 1-2, and the covenants are the ladder steps of that reestablishment.
- A. The eternal state described at the end of Revelation includes much of the same imagery from the first two chapters of Genesis, including the tree of life.
 - B. Several key themes and terms introduced in Gen 1-2 will be weaved throughout the biblical covenants and picking up on those terms and themes will help in understanding how the covenants interrelate to one another.
 - C. Key Themes: dominion/kingdom, (seventh day) rest, offspring/seed, sacrifice, and Edenic/creation conditions correlated with Yahweh's intimate presence

The Noahic Covenant

- I. Genesis 5, the "chapter of death" demonstrates God's faithfulness to the consequences of breaking the conditions of the pre-fall relationship with Yahweh.
- A. Because of Gen 3:15 and the promise of the male offspring, the rest of the account of Genesis is concerned with "finding" the offspring.
 - 1) This is the reason for Eve's excitement over the first birth.
 - 2) This is why genealogies in Genesis and the whole Bible are so important and worth our attention.
 - B. The genealogy continues with a similar pattern of death until 5:28-29.
 - 1) "Noah" is related to the Hebrew word for *rest*.
 - 2) Lamech in his reason for naming Noah what he does uses a verb meaning "to comfort" where the verb and Noah's name sound similar in Hebrew.
 - 3) Lamech is saying that through his son Yahweh will reverse the curse pronounced in Gen 3.
- II. Gen 6:5-7 describes the increasing evil and corruption on the earth and God's plan to wipe out mankind.

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- A. Disastrous news in light of God's promise of redemption in Gen 3:15
- B. Hope held out through Noah (Gen 6:8-9, 18)
 - 1) By grace, God provides a way to maintain his promise through Noah.
 - 2) First use of the term "covenant" in the whole Bible
 - 3) The covenant is not ratified at this point, but only after Noah acted in faith upon what God was telling Him to do through constructing the ark.
 - 4) Notice that Noah already has a relationship with Yahweh *before* the covenant is formally ratified.
- III. The Flood is presented as a de-creation of what God had made (Gen 7:11-24)
 - A. Similar language as in the creation account: "heavens," "beasts," "kinds," etc.
 - B. Waters covering everything just as described in Gen 1:2.
- IV. God and preserves Noah and his family.
 - A. Yahweh *remembers* Noah; this is covenant language (Gen 6:8).
 - B. The process of the earth drying out is essentially presented as a re-creation with Noah as a sort of new Adam (Gen 7:13-19)
- V. The establishment of God's covenant with Noah happens in Gen 8:20-9:17.
 - A. Notice that sacrifice (Gen 8:20-21) precedes Yahweh's formal ratification to Noah and his family about their inclusion in the covenant with its blessings and stipulations.
 - 1) Noah is thanking and worshiping God for preservation.
 - 2) Noah is recognizing that only through sacrifice is he able to have this gracious relationship with Yahweh and preservation from Yahweh's wrath in the Flood.
 - 3) Noah's sacrifice is what precipitates Yahweh's gracious enactment of the covenant.
 - B. God promises stability for the created order (Gen 8:20-22, 9:8-12). This enables the promise of Gen 3:15 to eventually take place.
 - C. Yahweh gives very similar commands to Noah and his family that he gave to Adam with some modifications because of the reality of sin in the world (Gen 9:1-7).
 - 1) God's ultimate purpose for mankind is still for God's own glory and dominion to be extended to the whole earth. The command to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" still holds.

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- 2) Capital punishment is instituted as a way of checking human violence and provides a measure of social stability.
- 3) Man's sin does not ultimately stop Yahweh's creation purpose, and He even uses sinful people who have a relationship with Him by faith to bring carry forward His purpose for His glory.

D. The sign of the covenant is the rainbow (Gen 9:12-17).

- 1) God "remembers" His everlasting covenant with all flesh on the earth through the rainbow.
- 2) When you see a rainbow, you should also remember this covenant and meditate on how God is actively restraining His wrath against mankind, including you, even though you also have the same corruption in your heart that justly deserves God's wrath.

VI. Summary of the Noachic Covenant's role in redemptive history

- A. The Noachic Covenant provides stability in the created order, including the preservation of the human race, so that the promised serpent-crushing seed of the woman can redeem humanity.
- B. Through Noah, the human race will ultimately be freed from the curse of sin and returned to the creation rest that God built into the created order to begin with.

Application Questions from Creation and the Noachic Covenant

- I. Do you understand that your purpose as a human being is to image forth Yahweh's rule and dominion over everything? Are you doing that in your relationships, work, freetime, etc.?
- II. Do you thank and praise God for your participation in this covenant? God has every right to wipe you out this instant because of the corruption in your own heart, but he has preserved you and given you the opportunity for redemption through the serpent-crushing seed of the woman—Jesus of Nazareth.
- III. Have you trusted in the person and work of the serpent-crushing seed of the woman? Are you seeking the advancement of His kingdom?

The Abrahamic Covenant

- I. The Flood did not solve the problem of human corruption but merely checked it for a time.
 - A. Gen 9:21 Shows that the same seed of corruption that blossomed into rampant sin before the Flood is still in human hearts from birth after the flood.
 - B. In the act of creating the tower of Babel, people were violating the stipulations of the Noachic covenant (Gen 9:7, 11:4).
 - 1) Yahweh confuses their language (Gen 11:7-9).

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- 2) Yahweh accomplishes the dispersion of the peoples over the face of the earth (His purpose for humanity) through the confusion of their language.
- II. The Search for the serpent-crushing seed is still in view.
- A. Noah blesses Shem above his brothers (Gen 9:25-27)
 - B. In Genesis, when there are multiple genealogies, the first ones are the lines Yahweh rejects as the line of the seed whereas the final one in a section is the chosen line of the seed.
 - 1) The line of the seed goes through Shem (Gen 10:21, where we get the terminology *Semetic*) and then through Eber (Gen 10:25, where we get the terminology *Hebrews*).
 - 2) Line goes through Terah (Gen 11:26) and as soon as Terah is mentioned a new section in Genesis (marked by the formula “these are the generations of...”) is begun, focusing on his descendants as the family tree of the seed.
- III. God’s promise and program with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3)
- A. Gen 12:1-3 is key to understanding God’s program with Abraham and the rest of the world.
 - B. However, Gen 12:1-3 is not the covenant proper (recall the definition of covenant), although it encompasses many promises by God to Abram as well as stipulations for Abram to follow.
 - C. **Stipulation:** “Go” (Gen 12:1)
 - 1) This was obedience out of faith.
 - 2) He is to go to a land that Yahweh would show him—it is not promised yet.
 - D. **Consequent Promises** (Gen 12:2-3)
 - 1) Being made into a great nation
 - 2) Blessing
 - 3) Having a great name (like what the people of Babel were trying to do for themselves)
 - 4) Divine judgment on those who curse
 - 5) Being a blessing to others
 - E. God’s program with Abram is not just national, it is universal.
 - 1) “All the clans of the ground”
 - 2) Adam was made from the ground, was to work the ground, the ground was cursed because of him, and was to return to the ground because of his sin and its curse.
 - 3) Here, Yahweh is promising His *blessing* over against His *curse* through Abraham.

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- IV. The next mention of God's purposes for Abram comes in Gen 13:14-17.
- A. Yahweh promises abundant land for Abraham and his offspring *forever*.
 - B. Yahweh promises Abraham abundant offspring.
 - C. Abraham is to walk through the land to see what Yahweh was going to give to him.
 - D. These promises are still not officially codified in a covenant as of yet.
- V. So far, Yahweh has promised Abraham, **land**, **seed (offspring)**, and **blessing**.
- VI. Genesis 15 contains the *first installment* of the Abrahamic Covenant proper.
- A. Gen 15:1-6 focuses on **offspring**
 - 1) Yahweh promises Abram a great reward.
 - 2) Abram questions how he can have a reward with no offspring.
 - 3) God reiterates His promise of multitudinous offspring.
 - 4) Abraham responds in faith, a faith which Yahweh reckons to him as righteousness.
 - B. Gen 15:7-20 focuses on **land**
 - 1) Abram asks Yahweh how he might know that he will possess the land God promised.
 - 2) Yahweh initiates the formal ratification of the covenant.
 - i. Yahweh's presence symbolized by an oven of smoke and a torch of fire pass through the cut animals.
 - ii. Only Yahweh passes through the pieces, not Abraham, as would be normally be expected of covenant partners.
 - 3) Yahweh takes upon Himself alone the ultimate responsibility of giving Abram's offspring the land of his sojournings.
 - 4) Although the covenant formally focuses on the land, the promise of offspring is clearly embedded in the covenant since it is to Abram's offspring that the land is given.
- VII. Abram and Sarai attempt to produce the promised offspring to Abram through Hagar in Genesis 16.
- A. Abram and Sarai are trusting in their own ability and timetable for God's promise.
 - B. Ishmael is born out of this contrivance when Abram is 86 years old.

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VIII. Genesis 17 contains the *second installment* of the Abrahamic Covenant.

- A. Notice this installment takes place at least 13 years after the first installment before the birth of Ishmael since Abram is now 99 years old.
- B. Since the promises given in this covenantal section encompass the promises already made to Abraham, including those given in the ratification of the covenant in Genesis 15, it is best to see this as a covenant renewal and extension, not a brand new covenant with Abraham.
- C. **Stipulations for Abraham** (Gen 17:1, 9-14)
 - 1) For Abraham (Gen 17:1)
 - i. “Walk before me...”—The idea is to live in the covenant relationship with loyalty and devotion.⁵
 - ii. “...and be blameless”—Not sinless perfection but a life that is characterized by irreproachable behavior and attitudes in the eyes of God.⁶
 - 2) For Abraham, his male descendants, and purchased male servants (Gen 17:9-14)
 - i. Circumcision
 - ii. This was also the sign of the covenant as a daily reminder that Abraham’s offspring had Yahweh as their God (Gen 17:7); they were to show covenant loyalty to Him.
- D. **Consequent Commitments by Yahweh** (Gen 17:2-8, 15-21)
 - 1) Great multiplication of Abraham (offspring)
 - 2) “A father of a multitude of nations”
 - i. This is not physical fatherhood since every other use of this particular Hebrew construction involves not physical fatherhood but an authoritative/beneficent relationship in a non-physical setting.⁷
 - ii. Gen 45:8 is the only other use of this construction in the book of Genesis and it is used of Joseph’s beneficent, authoritative rule in the land of Egypt and is a manifestation of this promise.
 - iii. This connects with Yahweh’s promise of universal blessing for the nations through Abraham (Gen 12:3).

⁵ Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath*, 87.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 88.

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- iv. To signify this promise, God changes Abram's name from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of a multitude).
 - 3) Abraham will be made into nations
 - 4) Kings will come from Abraham and Sarah
 - i. This connects with God's creation purposes with Adam to be a steward-king under Yahweh's rule to manifest Yahweh's glory over the whole of creation.
 - ii. This will be through God's chosen line of offspring, not through Ishmael.
 - iii. This demonstrates that the serpent-crushing seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) will come through Isaac's line.
 - 5) The covenant will be everlasting (the same terminology as in Gen 9:16 regarding the Noachic covenant).
 - 6) Yahweh will be God to Abraham and to His offspring.
- IX. Abraham keeps the covenant stipulations placed upon him.
- A. Abraham left his land as commanded in Genesis 12 and went to the land God showed to him.
 - B. Abraham walked before Yahweh in a blameless way, exemplified by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:15-18).
 - 1) God gives a final oath of ratification of the covenant to guarantee all of what Yahweh had promised to him.
 - 2) Yahweh also promises not only multitudinous offspring but also a particular offspring who will be victorious over his enemies, connecting with the promise of the serpent-crushing seed of the woman (Gen 3:15).
 - 3) The author of Hebrews affirms that this was the moment when it could be said that Abraham received the promises because now it was sealed with a covenant oath (Heb 6:13-18).
 - C. Later when Yahweh confirms the covenant with Isaac, Yahweh affirms it was because of Abraham's obedience that the blessings of the covenant would be enjoyed by his descendants (Gen 26:1-5)
 - D. Yahweh also confirms the covenant with Jacob (Gen 28:13-15)
- X. Conditionality and unconditionality in the Abrahamic Covenant
- A. The Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional in the sense that Yahweh takes it upon Himself alone to guarantee the covenant itself continues to exist and that the final promises of the covenant will be enjoyed by a future generation.

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- B. It is conditional in the sense that Abraham had to obey in order for the blessings of the covenant to be distributed.
- C. It is also conditional in the sense that Abraham's offspring could not enjoy the blessings of the covenant themselves if they were not faithful to it (cf. Gen 15:9-14 and circumcision).

XI. It is essential not to confuse Abraham's salvation with the covenant enacted with him.

- A. Yahweh graciously and unilaterally initiated a relationship with Yahweh in Genesis 12.
- B. Yahweh counted Abraham's faith in Yahweh as righteousness (Gen 15:6)
- C. The covenant with its conditions did not guarantee Abraham's salvation; salvation and the relationship with Yahweh predated the covenant.
- D. The obedience to Yahweh and to His covenant stipulations was a *result* of his relationship with Yahweh, *NOT* a producer of it.

XII. Summary of the Abrahamic Covenant and connections with what we have seen so far

- A. Yahweh guarantees **land**, **seed**, and **blessing** through Abraham
 - 1) The Land and its borders are described in Gen 15:18-20)
 - 2) The Seed
 - i. Many offspring
 - ii. Kingly offspring
 - iii. One victorious offspring (the serpent-crushing seed of the woman)
 - 3) The Blessing
 - i. Blessing to Abraham and his descendants
 - ii. Blessing to the nations Abraham and his descendants
 - iii. Blessing to the nations from the one offspring (cf. Gen 3:15)
- B. The Abrahamic Covenant essentially provides the conditions for a beachhead for the reestablishment of Yahweh's kingdom over the whole world.
- C. Connections with the Noahic Covenant
 - 1) The Noahic Covenant guaranteed stable conditions in the world until the establishment of the promise of Gen 3:15 with consequent rest and reversing of the curse.
 - 2) The Abrahamic Covenant provides the beachhead kingdom from which Yahweh will reestablish His rule over the whole earth through the serpent-crushing seed of the woman

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who will be Abraham's offspring, Isaac's offspring, Jacob's offspring, and Judah's offspring (Gen 49:8-12).

- XIII. By the end of Genesis, we see some of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant being fulfilled.
- A. Abraham's offspring are a blessing to other nations (Egypt through Joseph)
 - B. Abraham's offspring have begun to multiply (Jacob's twelve sons and their progeny)
 - C. They are in the wrong land.

Application Questions for Abrahamic Covenant

- I. Are you thankful and do you worship that you are a recipient of salvation blessing through Abraham's serpent-crushing seed, Jesus Christ?
- II. Are you looking forward to the future state of the world when the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are completely fulfilled and there is blessing for the whole world flowing from the land and nation of Israel?
- III. Are you trusting that Yahweh will ultimately fulfill His promises?

Mosaic Covenant

- I. Egypt became an incubator for the growth of the nation of Israel in fulfillment of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham (Ex 1:7)
- II. As Yahweh had foretold, Abraham's offspring were enslaved by another nation for four hundred years (Gen 15:13, Ex 1:8-14).
- III. Yahweh hears the groans of the people of Israel and *remembers* his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which incites Him to initiate the redemption of Israel from Egypt (Ex 2:23-25)
- IV. A relationship already existed between Yahweh and Israel as a nation before the Mosaic Covenant.
 - A. In the Abrahamic Covenant, Yahweh had promised to be God to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:7)
 - B. Thus, Yahweh calls Israel as a nation His son (Ex 4:22-23)
- V. Through the redemption of Israel in the Exodus, Yahweh claims Israel as His people (Ex 6:1-9).
 - A. Yahweh rescues Israel in a devastatingly glorious way so that Yahweh's name would be proclaimed in the whole earth (Ex 9:14-16).
 - B. Yahweh is tying himself to Israel in such a way that He might be glorified through them for generations to come.
- VI. The Mosaic Covenant (better termed the Israelite Covenant) is initiated at Mount Sinai

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- A. God’s purpose in His covenant with the nation of Israel is specified in Ex 19:3-6.
- 1) Notice the conditionality of the covenant: there is dependence on Israel’s obedience as a nation.
 - 2) Notice the *function* of the fulfillment of the covenant: Israel is to mediate the knowledge of the one true God to the rest of the nations as a crucial part of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.
- B. The initial giving of the Israelite Covenant is in Exodus 19-24 and is patterned after a treaty given from a superior to an inferior.
- 1) Such a treaty in Israel’s cultural context was formed when a king had performed a military conquest.
 - 2) The treaty would define the king’s relationship to His new subjects.⁸
 - 3) In the context of Exodus, Yahweh conquered Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt to redeem Israel.
 - 4) Parts of the treaty:

Treaty Section	Passage
Historical Prologue	Exodus 19:1-4
Preamble	Exodus 19:5-6
Stipulations (General & Specific)	Exodus 20:3-23:19
Provision for Reading	Exodus 24:4-7
Blessings and Curses	Exodus 23:20-23 ⁹

- C. The ratification of the covenant, including oaths, and also a covenant meal occur in Ex 24:1-11.
- D. The sign of the covenant is keeping the Sabbath (Ex 20:6-10, 31:12-17)

⁸ William D. Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 222.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

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- 1) The command for keeping the Sabbath is reiterated several times and the punishment for breaking the Sabbath is severe.
- 2) The Sabbath is rooted in the creation and with the perfection and goodness of the created order.
- 3) The Sabbath as a sign of the Israelite covenant identifies them with the Creator God and the people through whom the “New Eden” would be realized.

VII. The Tabernacle also identifies Israel with the Creator God and the restoration of edenic conditions.

- A. The artistry of the tabernacle evokes thoughts of Eden (e.g. cherubim, pomegranates, precious and luxurious materials).
- B. The sections of the tabernacle and increasing preciousness of the materials give a concrete visualization of increasing holiness and elevation as one approaches the presence of God.¹⁰

VIII. While the covenant between Yahweh and Israel is formally ratified on Mount Sinai, the implications of the covenant principles (the Ten Words/Commandments) expressed in a variety of stipulations continue to expand until basically the end of Deuteronomy.

- A. These stipulations come in basically two flavors: absolute commands (“Thou shalt not...” or “Thou shalt...”) or situational commands (“If an ox gores a man, then...”).
- B. It is essential to note that the commands are an *application* of covenant principles (the Ten Commandments).
- C. It is important to recognize the principle behind the command (the “spirit of the law”) in order for the covenant principles to be applied in different situations (e.g. Paul rightfully applies “Don’t muzzle the ox” to paying pastors who labor in teaching and preaching).

IX. The provision of priests and sacrifices ensured the possibility of restored communion with God when Israel would break the covenant stipulations.

- A. Sacrifice from the beginning was God’s pointer for how to have restored communion with and worship of Yahweh (Gen 3:21, Gen 4:3-4, Gen 8:20-21, Gen 12:7-8, etc.)
- B. Several covenants related to the priests and Levites are made during the development of the Israelite covenant.
 - 1) With the Levites (Ex 32:25-29, Jer 33:20-22, Mal 2:4-5)
 - 2) With Aaron (Num 18:6-7, 18-19)
 - 3) With Phineas and his descendants (Num 25:10-13; this is typically called the *Priestly Covenant*)

¹⁰ Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath*, 104.

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- C. These covenants are separate from the Israelite covenant, though parallel with it.
- X. The function of the covenant and its connections with the Abrahamic covenant.
 - A. As we saw earlier, Ex 19:3-6 gives the essential function of the covenant.
 - B. Deuteronomy 4:1-8 illustrates keeping Yahweh's commands would attract the nations' attention so that they might come to know the true God.
 - C. The blessings and curses of the covenant are most clearly and graphically spelled out in Lev 26 and Deut 28 and are essentially inheriting or disinheriting the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.
 - D. The Israelite covenant was an *administrative* covenant to inherit the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (Jer 11:1-5).
 - 1) As Israel the nation obeyed, Yahweh would bless them with land, seed, and abundant blessing so that the nations would be attracted to Israel and in turn be introduced to the one true God.
 - 2) The most full realization of this function is seen in Solomon's reign (1 Kgs 10)
 - 3) If Israel as a nation disobeyed, it would experience the exact opposite of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant: exile and scattering from the land, diminishing numbers, and abundant cursing and trouble.
 - 4) The most full realization of this function is seen in the Babylonian exile, before which the prophets were continually calling for the nations and its leaders to repent and keep the covenant with its stipulations.
- XI. This is the covenant from which we get the terminology "*Old Testament (Covenant)*"
- XII. Was it possible to keep this covenant?
 - A. It is essential to understand that this covenant was never, ever designed for an Israelite to earn their relationship with Yahweh (Deut 6:4-9).**
 - B. Deut 30:11-14 clearly says that the covenant stipulations ARE doable; all the components of each individual person within the nation are in place to where that person *should* be able to obey and *should* obey.
 - C. However, while there is no *natural* inability towards obedience, Moses has already told the Israelites that there is a *moral* inability to obey.
 - 1) Deut 29:2-4 and 30:6 shows that Israel *as a nation* needs Yahweh to change their heart so that they *want* to obey.
 - 2) The situation could be compared to a person who is physically well but who does not have the will to keep on living.

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- D. Faithful obedience is possible by the individual Israelite who trusts in Yahweh to do a heart work that they cannot do themselves.
- 1) The covenant stipulations and knowledge of their own heart should have driven each individual Israelite to acknowledge their own corruption, sin, and moral inability and should have driven them in faith to Yahweh Who alone could perform the necessary heart change.
 - 2) The OT attests individuals who were saved by faith and had a regenerated heart to where they were faithful in keeping God's covenant.
 - 3) However, *as a nation*, the totality of the people of Israel have never had this heart to obey their covenant stipulations with Yahweh.

XIII. As the OT story progresses, the Israelite Covenant is renewed several times (e.g. Joshua, Kings, Ezra/Nehemiah).

XIV. Even though Deuteronomy acknowledges the Israelites *will* break their covenant with Yahweh, Yahweh holds out the hope of ultimate heart change, repentance, and restoration for the nation even after all the curses of the covenant have come upon them (Deut 30:1-10).

Application Questions for the Mosaic Covenant

- I. Do you *rely* on your own goodness and obedience for your relationship with God or is obedience and repentance a *response* to the heart change through relationship that God has already sovereignly and graciously established through the Messiah?
- II. Are you conscious of and intentional with the commands God wants you to obey as a Christian?
- III. Do you long for and prayer for Israel's repentance and seeking of Yahweh with their whole heart as a nation through their heart change when they seek the Messiah? As Paul says Romans 11:11-16, this will mean amazing blessing for the whole world!

The Davidic Covenant

- I. Background
 - A. The Deuteronomy generation that went into the promised land with Joshua was fairly faithful to the Israelite covenant under Joshua's leadership (Jdg 2:6-7).
 - B. The time of the Judges was multiple cycles of covenant treachery leading to covenant curses leading to superficial repentance leading to Yahweh's deliverance of His people through a judge leading to a time of peace and prosperity leading to covenant treachery again.
 - 1) The cycles are really spirals down and down into greater depravity.
 - 2) The judges themselves become more and more corrupt (e.g. Samson).
 - 3) Judges 17-20 give clear concrete pictures of how bad the nation had gotten.

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- 4) The author of Judges indicates that the problem was there was no king in Israel (Jdg 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25).
- C. There had been a promise for a king in Israel for hundreds of years.
- 1) This is mentioned in God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:6).
 - 2) Jacob prophesies everlasting kingship through Judah (Gen 49:8-12).
 - 3) In the language used of this coming king, it becomes clearer and clearer that he is to be identified with the serpent-crushing seed of the woman in Gen 3:15.
 - 4) Balaam unintentionally prophesies about this coming king (Num 24:17-19).
- D. The stipulations of the Israelite Covenant itself provided for a king (Deut 17:14-20)
- 1) Yahweh was to choose the king.
 - 2) The Law itself was to be the king's standard.
- E. Israel demands a king when Samuel is old and his sons are corrupt judges (1 Sam 8:4-7, 19-22)
- 1) It was not wrong for Israel to want the office of king.
 - 2) The kind of king they wanted was wrong.
- F. Israel gets what it asks for in Saul son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin.
- 1) Since he is from Benjamin, we know that there is something wrong with this kingship over Israel (cf. Gen 49:10).
 - 2) Saul disobeys Yahweh's commands because he fears man and desires his own honor above Yahweh's (1 Sam 15:24-28)
- G. After rejecting Saul, Yahweh chooses a king for himself from among Jesse's (the Bethlehemite and Judahite) sons (1 Sam 16:1).
- 1) Yahweh's choice is not in accordance with external appearance but in accordance with His own heart values and character (1 Sam 16:6-7).
 - 2) Yahweh chooses Jesse's youngest son David to be king in Saul's place and the Holy Spirit comes upon him (1 Sam 16:12-13)
- H. It is important to note that the Hebrew word from where we get the term "Messiah" means "Anointed One" and it refers most often to the king of Israel.
- I. David waits many long years evading Saul and triumphing over Saul's supporters and remaining sons before he is firmly established as king over all Israel (2 Sam 5:1-5).

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II. Establishment of the Covenant

- A. The two key chapters that record the establishment of the Davidic Covenant are 2 Sam 7 and 1 Chr 17.
- B. Key commentary on the covenant occurs throughout the rest of the OT, but particularly Psalm 89 and Psalm 132.
- C. The precipitation of the covenant is David's desire to build a "house" (temple) for Yahweh (2 Sam 7:2).
- D. Yahweh says that David will not build a house for Him (2 Sam 17:5)
 - 1) Yahweh affirms that it was right in principle for David to want to do this (1 Kgs 8:18).
 - 2) Yahweh denies David the right to build the temple because of how much blood and warfare David had partaken in (1 Chron 22:8).
 - 3) Rather Solomon (whose name is derived from the Hebrew root meaning "peace") was to build the temple.
- E. **Yahweh's Promises**
 - 1) A great name (2 Sam 7:9 cf. Gen 12:2)
 - 2) An undisturbed, established place for Israel (2 Sam 7:10 cf. Gen 12:7, 13:15, 15:18)
 - 3) Rest from enemies (2 Sam 7:10-11, cf. Gen 5:29)
 - 4) A house (dynasty) (2 Sam 7:12-16 cf. Gen 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 17:7-10, 19)
 - i. House-building seed (2 Sam 7:13)
 - ii. Forever-reigning seed (2 Sam 7:13, 15-16)
 - 5) A Father-son relationship with David's offspring (2 Sam 7:14 cf. Ex 4:22-23)
- F. **Conditions on David's Seed**
 - 1) David's seed is to obey in order to experience the blessings of the covenant; if he was disobedient, the seed would be disciplined (2 Sam 7:14).
 - 2) Psalm 89:30-32 explains this idea further, showing (in accordance with Deut 17) that the measuring rod of conduct for the king was obedience to the Israelite (Mosaic) covenant.
- G. The word "covenant" is not used in 2 Sam 7 or 1 Chr 17, but further revelation demonstrates that this is how what Yahweh pronounced to David was viewed (Ps 89:3-4).
- H. Though not explicitly stated, the Temple is arguably the sign of the Davidic Covenant.

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- 1) The whole covenant came as a result of David's expressed desire to build Yahweh a temple.
- 2) 2 Samuel 7:13 guarantees that a son of David would build Yahweh a temple.
- 3) After building the first temple, Yahweh connects for Solomon the conditions of the Davidic Covenant with the presence of the temple in the land (1 Kgs. 9:3-9).

III. Conditionality and unconditionality of the Davidic Covenant

- A. The covenant is unconditional in the sense that there *will be* an offspring of David's line who will receive *all* of the covenant blessings in complete fullness.
- B. The covenant is unconditional in the sense that Yahweh's loyal love (a covenant term) will never depart from David's line; He will never "give up" on David's offspring (2 Sam 7:15, Ps 89:33-37).
- C. The covenant is conditional in that any one of David's offspring who does not obey God's stipulations as laid out in the Israelite covenant will forfeit the blessings of the Davidic covenant.

IV. Connections with Creation and the previous covenants.

- A. Yahweh's original design for the spread of His glory over the planet was for a man (Adam) to be a servant-king under Yahweh's reign exercising dominion.
 - 1) After the Fall, such a king (identified with the serpent-crushing seed of the woman) is promised to come through Abraham (Gen 17:6) and subsequently Judah (Gen 49:10).
 - 2) The Davidic Covenant provides for an everlasting kingdom over the whole planet (Ps 72:8-11, 17)
- B. Yahweh would ultimately provide rest for the whole of humanity through the Noahic Covenant as He would provide stability for the promise of Gen 3:15 to come about. This sort of rest is promised in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:11).
- C. The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are land, seed, in blessing. These promises are reiterated and tied to the Davidic king's reign through the Davidic Covenant.
- D. The Israelite (Mosaic) Covenant was the administrative covenant for Israel to receive the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. It is also the administrative covenant for the Davidic covenant.
 - 1) It is important to recognize in this connection the *solidarity* concept of Israel and its King.
 - 2) Israel and the Davidic king are both called Yahweh's son (Ex 4:22-23, 2 Sam 7:14).
 - 3) The king embodies the nation as its representative head.
 - 4) As Israel's history bears out, if the king obeys, Israel obeys and receives the blessings of the covenant; if the king disobeys, Israel disobeys and receives the covenant curses.

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- E. Summary: The Davidic Covenant provides for the eternal earth-wide reign of a king from a throne in Jerusalem, leading the nation of Israel in obedience to the Mosaic Covenant to receive the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, through the stability promised in the Noachic Covenant, bringing blessing and rest to the whole world, and reestablishing Gen 1-2 conditions and relationship with Yahweh, the ultimate king.
- V. The closest fulfillment of the promises of these covenants occurs during the reign of Solomon 1 Kings 2-10.
- A. Solomon at the start of his reign is obedient to the stipulations of the Israelite covenant and leads the people in obedience and worship to Yahweh.
 - B. Solomon builds a fantastic temple with imagery evocative of the garden of Eden through which to worship Yahweh.
 - C. Yahweh blesses Solomon's kingdom and more or less expands his rule to the borders promised to Abraham.
 - D. There is extreme abundance for all Israel and they are at rest in the land promised to them.
 - E. The nations (represented by the Queen of Sheba) are attracted to Israel and so Israel begins to perform its priestly function to the nations, displaying the glory of the true God.
 - F. Yet, Solomon's disobedience to the stipulations of Deut 17 causes his and Israel's downfall.
 - G. Even before this, David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah caused the curse of a sword to never depart from David's line (2 Sam 12:10).
- VI. Jesus of Nazareth is the king promised by the Davidic Covenant (Rom 1:1-4)
- A. "Christ" comes from the Greek word for "anointed one," and is the New Testament equivalent of "Messiah."
 - B. The gospel is integrally connected with the ultimate reign of the Davidic king.
 - C. Israel rejected its king during His first coming and are in a very real sense in exile (Acts 1:6-7).
 - 1) As we have seen in Mark, the rejection of the king has ushered in the age of the "invisible kingdom" of God, consisting of redeemed souls throughout all nations part of the body of the universal, invisible church over which Jesus reigns as king.
 - 2) Israel will one day be made jealous of the nations' relationship with Yahweh, will look on Him Whom they have pierced and will be saved as a nation (Rom 11:11-16, 25-29; Zech 12:10).
 - D. Jesus is not yet on the throne of David, but will be one day, bringing more blessing to all the families of the earth.

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Application Questions for the Davidic Covenant

- I. Do you worship and submit to Jesus as your king?
- II. Do you long for and pray for Israel to become jealous of our salvation, to embrace their king so that abundant blessing might come to the whole world?
- III. Do you marvel at the fact that you have been included in the kingdom of David's son and David's Lord and will participate in that global kingdom for all eternity? Do you worship and give thanks to Yahweh, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?
- IV. Do you participate in the spread of the Messiah's kingdom over the souls of people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people for the glory of His name (Matt 28:18-20)?

The New Covenant

- I. Background
 - A. Deuteronomy pointed to the fact that the Israelites needed a spiritual heart transformation by Yahweh Himself in order to obey the stipulations of the Israelite Covenant as a nation (Deut 30:6).
 - B. The time of the judges after Joshua bore witness to the fact that Israel as a nation, Israel had a moral inability to obey the Law and they needed a king to lead them in obedience to that Law.
 - C. However, after receiving Yahweh's chosen kingly line through the Davidic Covenant, Israel and Judah preceded through a downward spiral much like the time of the judges because of the disobedience of their kings and themselves to the Israelite Covenant; both the king and the nation had a heart problem.
 - D. True to the covenant stipulations, Yahweh gradually increased the covenant consequences for Israel and her kings because of their idolatry and lack of loyalty and obedience to Him as their covenant Lord.
 - E. Throughout this time of the kingdom, Yahweh had faithfully warned His people through the prophets, but they did not listen, and so were exiled, Israel by Assyria and Judah by Babylon (2 Kings 17:7-19).
 - F. Through the prophets, Yahweh had promised a return and regathering of the exiles after 70 years, yet when the time came only a very small number came back into the land of Israel and to Jerusalem (cf. Ezra).
 - G. Even after returning in such small numbers, it is abundantly clear that Israel still has a heart problem and does not love Yahweh and obey the stipulations of the Israelite Covenant (cf. Ezra/Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).
 - H. Furthermore, after the exile, David's heir does not reside on the throne (although Zerubbabel is governor for a time) since the land is still subject to Gentile control.