

Covenant, Abrahamic

Covenants play an important role in the relationship between God and man in Scripture. The relationship between God and humanity is, in a word, covenantal. God does not deal with his creation apart from covenant. The role of a covenant in God's plan for history is that they mediate the relational interaction between God and mankind. The dispensations reveal God's plan for history.

In the Bible covenants deal with relationship, while dispensations relate to history. However, the biblical role of a covenant is not to provide a framework for biblical history but instead to define relationships between God and mankind that He is working out through a diverse plan for history as expressed through the various dispensations.

There are three major kinds of covenants in the Bible:

The ROYAL GRANT Treaty (unconditional)—a promissory covenant that arose out of a king's desire to reward a loyal servant.

EXAMPLES: The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3;15; 17:1-21) The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:4-17)

The SUZERAIN-VASSAL Treaty (conditional)—bound an inferior vassal to a superior suzerain and was binding only on the one who swore.

EXAMPLES:

- Chedorlaomer (Gen 14)
- Jabesh-Gilead serving Nahash (1 Sam 11:1)
- The Adamic Covenant (Gen 2:15–25; Hosea 6:7) The Noahic Covenant (Gen 8:20—9:17)
- The Mosaic Covenant (Book of Deuteronomy)

The PARITY Treaty—bound two equal parties in a relationship and provided conditions as stipulated by the participants.

EXAMPLES:

- Abraham and Abimelech (Gen 21:25-32)
- Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:44-50)
- David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1-4; Cf. 2 Sam 9:1-13) Christ and Church Age believers, ie., "friends" (John 15)

Types of Covenants

(1) Conditional - Edenic & Mosaic

A proposal of God to man is characterized by the formula: if you will, then I will whereby God promises to grant special blessings to man providing man fulfills certain conditions

contained in the covenant. Man's failure to do so often results in punishment. Thus one's response to the covenant agreement brings either blessings or cursings. The blessings are secured by obedience and man must meet his conditions before God will meet His.

(2) Unconditional (Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, New)

A sovereign act of God whereby He unconditionally (unilaterally) obligates Himself to bring to pass definite promises, blessings and conditions for the covenanted people. This covenant is characterized by the formula: *I will* which declares God's determination to do as He promises. Blessings are secured by the grace of God. There may be conditions in the covenant by which God requests the covenanted one to fulfill out of gratitude, but they are not themselves the basis of God's fulfilling His promises.

Covenants made directly with Israel:

- Mosaic (conditional)
- Abrahamic (unconditional)
- Land (unconditional)
- Davidic (unconditional)
- New (unconditional)

These covenants are:

1. Literal - literal covenants that must be interpreted literally
2. Eternal - not in any way restricted or altered by time
3. Unconditional - not abrogated due to disobedience or unbelief; dependent upon God for fulfillment
4. Made directly with Israel (Rom 9:4; Eph 2:11-12)

Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant is contained in six passages: Gen 12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18, and is repeated at least 20x in Genesis alone (12:1-3,7-9; 13:14-18; 15:1-18; 17:1-27; 22:15-19; 26:2-6,24-25; 27:28-29,38-40; 28:1-4,10-22; 31:3,11-13; 32:22-32; 35:9-15; 48:3-4,10-20; 49:1-28; 50:23-25). The covenant is between God and Abraham, who stood as the representative head of the Jewish nation (not all of humanity).

God established this covenant with Abraham (and the Jewish people) to rebuild what mankind lost in the Fall. Therefore, it could be called a redemptive covenant. As detailed below, this covenant contains promises made specifically to Abraham, Israel, and some flow to Gentiles. This is why virtually all aspects of this covenant continue into the present Church Age and will also carry on into the Messianic Kingdom.

Gen 15:1-21 contains many provisions of the covenant. The emphasis is:

1. Abraham would father one nation in particular
2. Abraham would father many nations in general
3. God signs and seals the covenant, and determines the borders of the Land as extending from the river in Egypt in the south, to the great river Euphrates in the north. The signing was done in such a way that it rendered the covenant unconditional.

Gen 17:1-21 emphasizes the token of the covenant: circumcision. Just as the rainbow was the token of the Noahic Covenant, circumcision was the token of the Abrahamic Covenant. Gen 22:15-18 emphasizes that due to Abraham's obedience in the sacrificing of Isaac, God would bless his multiply his seed as the stars of heaven, possess the gate of his enemies, and through Abraham all the nations of the world would be blessed.

There are 14 provisions in this covenant:

1. A *great nation* was to come out of Abraham, namely, the nation of Israel (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:1-2,7; 22:17b)
2. He was promised a Land; specifically, the land of Canaan (Gen 12:1,7; 13:14-15,17; 15:17-21; 17:8)
3. Abraham himself was to be greatly blessed (Gen 12:2b)
4. Abraham's name would be great (Gen 12:2c)
5. Abraham will be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2d)
6. Those who bless Israel will be blessed (Gen 12:3a)
7. Those who curse Israel will be cursed (Gen 12:3b)
8. In Abraham all will ultimately be blessed, incorporating a promise of blessing for the Gentiles (Gen 12:3c; 22:18)
9. Abraham would receive a son through his wife Sarah (Gen 15:1-4; 17:16-21)
10. His descendants would undergo the Egyptian bondage (Gen 15:13-14)
11. Other nations as well as Israel would come forth from Abraham (Gen 17:3-4,6) (the Arab states are some of these nations).
12. His name was to be changed from *Abram*, meaning "exalted father," to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude" (Gen 17:5)
13. *Sarai's* name, meaning "my princess," was to be changed to Sarah, meaning "the princess" (Gen 17:15)

14. Circumcision was to be a token of the covenant (Gen 17:9,14; thus, according to the Abrahamic Covenant, circumcision was to be a sign of one's Jewishness. The practice of circumcision did not begin with Abraham since others in the ancient Near East practiced the ritual either at birth or puberty. The uniqueness of Jewish circumcision is not the act, but the timing of the act: on the eighth day. Circumcision would show this to be a blood covenant and hence emphasized its solemnity. It would also show that this sign of Jewishness is passed on through natural generation.

The provisions are categorized in three areas: to Abraham, to Israel, and to the Gentiles:

Abraham - [1,2,3,4,5,6,9,11,12,13] He was to be the father of a great nation, Israel. He was to possess all of the Promised Land. He would father many nations (both the Jewish nation as well as Arab nations). He was to receive special blessings and was to be a blessing to others. His name was to become great.

Israel - [1,2,5,6,7,10,14] Israel would be a great nation. It was to possess all of the Promised Land. It would receive victory over its enemies. The fact that the promises were made to both Abraham and his seed shows that these blessings have not yet received complete fulfillment, but await the Millennial Kingdom.

Gentiles - [6,7,8,11] Gentiles would be blessed for blessing Israel and cursed for cursing Israel. They would ultimately receive spiritual blessings, but these would come through one specific Seed, the Messiah. While physical blessings were limited to the Jews, spiritual blessings would extend to Gentiles through the Messiah.

Foundational Covenant

Reducing the Abrahamic Covenant to the basics, it has three aspects: Land, Seed, and Blessing. The Land aspect is developed more fully in the Land Covenant. The Seed aspect is developed in the Davidic Covenant, and the Blessings are developed in the New Covenant. It is important to understand that all three parts of the covenant (land, seed & blessing) were bound together as one promise, with a promise that this one promise was eternal. Most will grant that the seed and gospel aspects of this promise are eternal, but somehow think it is possible to dissect the eternal promise of the land from the other two eternal aspects. However, dissecting out the land aspect exposes the other two to diminution and a time limitation.

Walvoord: *The Abrahamic covenant contributes to the eschatology of Israel by detailing the broad program of God as it affects Abraham's seed.... It is not too much to say that the exegesis of the Abrahamic Covenant and its resulting interpretation is the foundation for the study of prophecy as a whole, not only as relating to Israel, but also for the Gentiles and the church. It is here that the true basis for premillennial interpretation of the Scriptures are found.*

Confirmation of the Covenant

- Isaac - Abraham had eight sons by three different women. Through which son would the covenant be confirmed? God revealed that it was only through Sarah's son Isaac (Gen 26:2-5). The covenant was later reconfirmed to Isaac in Gen 26:24.
- Jacob - Isaac had two sons, and God chose to confirm the covenant with Jacob, the younger (Gen 28:13-15).
- Sons of Jacob - The covenant was confirmed to all of Jacob's 12 sons in Gen 49.

The Abrahamic Covenant became the basis for the Dispensation of Promise. Because the Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional, it is still in effect today (largely unfulfilled). The ultimate fulfillment will come during the Kingdom Age. Some examples of this include: Ex 2:23-25; 4:24-26; 6:2-8; 32:11-14; Lev 26:46; Deut 34:4; 2 Kings 13:22-23; 1 Chr 16:15-19; 2 Chr 20:7-8; Neh 9:7-8; Ps 105:7-12; Luke 1:54-55,68-73; Gal 3:15-18; Heb 6:13-20.

These verses note that the Abrahamic Covenant was the basis for:

- The Exodus
- Giving them the Land
- Jewish survival in spite of disobedience
- For the coming of the Messiah
- For the resurrection of the dead
- For Israel's final redemption and restoration

The Abrahamic Covenant is a good example of what was stated earlier: that a covenant could be signed and sealed at a specific point of time, but not every provision goes immediately into effect, but rather, three different things happen. Some went into effect right away such as the change of names and circumcision. Some went into effect in the near future, for there was a 25 year wait for the birth of Isaac and a 400 year wait before the conquest of the Land. Some provisions go into effect in the prophetic distant future such as the settlement of all of the Promised Land, which has not been fulfilled to this day.

Relationship of Abrahamic Covenant to Mosaic Covenant

It is important to understand the relationship of an unconditional covenant, such as the Abrahamic Covenant, to that of a conditional covenant, such as the Mosaic Covenant.

Unconditional covenants provide humanity with God's sovereign decree, telling us where He is taking history. On the other hand, conditional covenants provide us with the means He will use to get us there.

God has said in the Abrahamic covenant that he will do certain things for the seed of Abraham, and the Mosaic Covenant provides conditional stipulations that must be met before a decree from the Abrahamic Covenant can take place. God decreed that Israel would receive certain blessings within the land of Israel, but that they would only enjoy

them if they were obedient. When the Israelites disobeyed, they would be cursed. That cursing would eventually lead to obedience and finally result in the ultimate blessing promised in the Abrahamic covenant.