Covenants

Definition and Description

There have been 8 Covenants that God has made throughout history. 3 were made with Gentiles and 5 with the Jews.

So what is a covenant? A covenant is a compact or agreement between 2 parties binding them mutually to undertakings on each other’s behalf. Theologically (used of relations between God and man) it denotes a gracious undertaking entered into by God for the benefit and blessing of man, and specifically of those men who by faith receive the promises and commit themselves to the obligations, which this undertaking involves.

The word used most often in the OT to express the covenant concept is the Hebrew noun בְּרִית (bərīṯ). A general characteristic of the OT בְּרִית is its unalterable and permanently binding character. There 2 categories of covenants: (1) Conditional (2) Unconditional.

The fulfillment of unconditional covenants depended entirely upon the faithfulness of God rather than the man whereas the fulfillment of a conditional covenant depended upon the faithfulness of man.

In a conditional covenant, that which was covenanted depended on the recipient of the covenant for its fulfillment, not on the one making the covenant. Certain obligations or conditions would need to be kept by the recipient of the covenant before the giver of the covenant would be obligated to fulfill what was promised. This type of covenant has an “if” attached to it. The Mosaic Covenant made by God with Israel is an example of a conditional covenant.

In an unconditional covenant, on the other hand, that which was covenanted depended for its fulfillment solely on the one making the covenant. That which was promised was sovereignly given to the recipient of the covenant on the authority and integrity of the one making the covenant, entirely apart from the merit or response of the receiver. It was a covenant with no “if” attached to it whatsoever.

Now we need to clarify an important aspect of an unconditional covenant. An unconditional covenant which binds the one making the covenant to a certain course of action, may have blessings attached to it that are conditioned on the response of the recipient. That response is simply faith or to trust that God will deliver on His promise. We must understand that an unconditional covenant may have certain blessings attached to it. Faith or trusting God to deliver on His promises is the condition. Faith manifests itself in obedience to God’s Word. The fulfillment of unconditional covenants does not depend on the continued obedience
of the recipient but rather the integrity and faithfulness of God who instituted the covenant.

Facts about the covenants to Israel: (1) Literal (2) Eternal (Except Mosaic) (3) Unconditional (Except Mosaic) (4) Made with a covenant people Israel (Rm. 9:4; Eph. 2:11-12).

So God has made 8 covenants with man throughout history and they all relate to the earth. Each one introduces a new dispensation. Six of them were given to individual men and are named after them, as in the case with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David and went into effect during their lives except the one given to David, which took effect at the birth of Jesus. Each one has a time element and runs out or expires at a particular time. Four of these covenants are known by a “sign.”


8 is the number associated with Resurrection and Regeneration. It is the beginning of a new era or order. Once these 8 covenants have all been literally fulfilled, and then human history will come to an end, followed by the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth.

7 conditions contained in the Edenic Covenant: (1) Restore the earth (Gn. 1:2). (2) Subdue the earth (3) Dominion over the animal creation (4) Restrict themselves to a vegetable diet (5) Cultivate the Garden (6) Abstain from eating of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (7) Spiritual death resulting in physical death as a result of disobeying the 6th condition. The Adamic covenant is noted in Genesis 3:14-19.

Adamic covenant was without conditions and entailed the following: (1) Curse (2) Promise. The Curse was 4-fold: (1) As to the serpent (2) As to the woman (3) As to the man (4) As to the earth. The Promise stated that the Lord would provide a Deliverer who would redeem them and the earth from the Curse.
The 3rd covenant or agreement made by God with members of the human race was with Noah (Gen. 9). The Noahic covenant contained the following provisions: (1) God would never again curse the earth on account of man and that day and night and seasons would never cease. (2) Noah and his descendants would multiply and replenish the earth. (3) Noah and his descendants would have dominion over the animal kingdom. (4) The diet of the human race would not be restricted to a vegetable diet. (5) Capital punishment instituted. (6) A flood shall never destroy the earth again.

The 4th covenant is the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3). The Abrahamic Covenant was an unconditional covenant meaning that the agreement was based upon the Lord’s faithfulness and not Abraham’s. The Lord was responsible to fulfill the agreement and Abraham’s part was to take God at His Word and accept it by means of faith. The Abrahamic covenant is related to the race of the nation.

The Abrahamic Covenant contained 7 promises: (1) “I will make from you a great nation” (National Posterity: Gen. 17:20; Spiritual Posterity: Gal. 3:6, 7, 29. (2) “I will bless you” (Temporal: Gen. 13:14-18; 15:18-21; 24:34-35; Spiritual: Gen. 15:6). (3) “And Make Your Name Great” (4) “And You Shall Be A Blessing” (Gal. 3:14). (5) “I Will Bless Them That Bless You” (6) “And Curse Them That Curse You” (7) “In You All the Families of the Earth Will Be Blessed” (Dt. 28:8-14; Is. 60:3-5, 11, 16). This covenant with Abraham was reaffirmed and confirmed after Abraham’s faith was tested (Gen. 22:15-18).

This covenant with Abraham became an “everlasting” covenant. Circumcision was the “sign” of this covenant with Abraham and the covenant extends to the end of human history, entailing the New Earth. The Abrahamic covenant was confined to the Jews (Gen. 17:1-14).

The 5th covenant is the Mosaic Covenant and was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai shortly after the Exodus from Egypt. It ushered in the dispensation of the Law. The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant meaning that it was conditioned on the obedience of the Jews to the covenant. The Mosaic Law was perfectly fulfilled by the impeccable humanity of Christ in hypostatic union during His 1st Advent (Rm. 10:4). It details the policy of the nation. The sign of the Ceremonial Law was the Sabbath (Ex. 31:12-18).

The 6th covenant is the Davidic Covenant. This covenant was of course given to David through the prophet Nathan. The Davidic Covenant was an unconditional covenant, which was based upon the faithfulness of God rather than the faithfulness of Israel. The Davidic covenant deals with the dynasty that will rule the client nation (2 Sa. 7:4-17). God promised David that a descendant of his would sit on his throne forever. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, will literally fulfill this covenant during His millennial reign.
The Davidic Covenant contains 4 promises: (1) A Davidic House: Posterity of David will never be destroyed. (2) A Davidic Throne: Kingdom of David shall never be destroyed. (3) A Davidic Kingdom: David’s Son (Christ) will have an earthly sphere of rule. (4) It Shall Be Unending. The “sign” of the Davidic Covenant is a Son (Lord Jesus Christ).

Provisions of the Davidic Covenant: (1) David is to have a child, yet to be born, who will succeed him and establish his kingdom (2) This son (Solomon), instead of David, will build the temple. (3) The throne of his kingdom will be established forever. (4) The throne will not be taken away from him (Solomon) even though his sins justify God’s discipline. (5) David’s house, throne and kingdom will be established forever.

The essential features of the Davidic Covenant are found in 3 words in 2 Samuel 7:16: (1) House (physical descendants): A line stemming from David would continue indefinitely and would be the divinely recognized royal line. (2) Kingdom (political body): the political body that David would rule and over which David’s descendants would successively reign. (3) Throne (right to rule): refers to the authority as king vested in him.

Just as important as these 3 terms is the word forever. The word “forever” refers to any time during which the descendants of Abraham would exist. Even though there might be temporary interruptions in the exercise of royal authority because of divine discipline, the authority would never transfer to another line. As in the case of the Abrahamic covenant, this covenant with David is restated and reconfirmed elsewhere in Scripture.

Ps 89:34-37, “My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful. Selah.”

The Davidic covenant is also confirmed in the following passages: Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-17, 20-21; Ezek. 37:24-25; Dan. 7:13-14; Hos. 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; Zech. 14:4, 9.

One of the royal titles that the Lord Jesus Christ possesses is that of the “Son of David,” which denotes His rulership over the nation of Israel (Matt. 1:1; 20:30; Mark 10:47-48; Luke 1:32; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 3:7; 5:5; 22:16). The Bible anticipates a future literal fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.

The prophetic implications of the Davidic Covenant: (1) Israel must be preserved as a nation. (2) Israel must have a national existence and be brought back into the land of her inheritance. (3) David’s descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, must return to the earth, bodily and literally, in order to reign over David’s
covenanted kingdom. (4) A literal earthly kingdom must exist over which the returned Messiah will reign. (5) This kingdom must become an eternal kingdom.

The 7th Covenant is the Palestinian Covenant. The Palestinian Covenant was given to Israel through Moses and was unconditional. The Palestinian covenant is related to the land that the Lord will give the nation of Israel. It will be literally fulfilled during the Millennial reign of Christ. This is an awesome covenant. It is the land grant to Israel. The largest Jewish Kingdom was during the reign of David and it was not even 1/20 or 1/30 of the land grant. The land grant was first promised to Abraham in Genesis 13:14-15 and Genesis 15:18.

Gen 13:14-15, “The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever.”

Gen 15:18, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.”

It was confirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-4) and was confirmed to Jacob (Gen. 35:12). It was reiterated to Moses (Ex. 6:2-8). Moses described the geographical boundaries of the land in Numbers 34:1-2. Moses prophesied the fulfillment of this covenant during the Millennium in Deuteronomy 30:1-9.

To encourage the Jews to enter the land God confirmed the land grant to Joshua in Joshua 1:2-4. Josh 1:2-4, “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory.”

Jeremiah and Ezekiel both confirmed the fulfillment of the land grant and related it to the New Covenant with Israel. The Land Grant under the Palestinian Covenant: (1) Most of the land in Turkey (2) Most of East Africa (3) Saudi Arabia (4) Yemen (5) Oman and Red Sea (6) Syria (7) Iraq (8) Jordan. The land grant has boundaries on the Mediterranean, on Aegean Sea, on Euphrates River and the Nile River.

7 Features of the Palestinian Covenant: (1) The nation will be plucked off the land for its unfaithfulness (Dt. 28:63-68; 30:1-3). (2) There will be a future repentance of Israel (Dt. 28:63-68; 30:1-3). (3) Israel’s Messiah will return (Dt. 30:3-6). (4) Israel will be restored to the land (Dt. 30:5). (5) Israel will be converted as a nation (Dt. 30:4-8; cf. Rm. 11:26-27). (6) Israel’s enemies will be judged (Dt. 30:7). (7) The nation will then receive her full blessing (Dt. 30:9).
The prophets of Israel prophesied of the Palestinian Covenant’s literal fulfillment (Isa. 11:11-12; 14:1-3; 27:12-13; 49:8-16; 66:20-22; Jer. 16:14-16; 23:3-8; 30:10-11; 31:8, 31-37; Ezek. 11:17-21; 20:33-38; 34:11-16; 39:25-29; Hos. 1:10-11; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 8:4-8).

The Tribulation is a period in which God will significantly deal with the nation of Israel to bring it to repentance, thus setting the stage for the fulfillment of the covenanted blessings believers will experience and the establishment of the kingdom after Christ’s 2nd Advent.

The 8th and final covenant is the New Covenant. The number 8 as we noted is the number associated with Resurrection and Regeneration. It speaks of a new era and new order of things. The fulfillment of the New Covenant during the Millennial Reign of Christ will mark the completion of human history and will be followed by the creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

The New Covenant is unconditional meaning that it is based upon the faithfulness of God rather than the faithfulness of Israel (Jer. 31:31-37). The New covenant is related to the restoration of the nation during the 2nd Advent and subsequent Millennial reign of Christ.

There were additional blessings added to the unconditional Abrahamic covenant. Before the covenant nation could enjoy the covenanted blessings it must walk in obedience to the laws of God. The obedience required was outlined for the nation in the Mosaic Law, which was given alongside the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:19) to define what God expected as a prerequisite for blessing. The nation of Israel as we have noted was unable to fulfill the obedience the Law required. The Mosaic Law cannot justify an individual before God (Rom. 3:20-28; Gal. 2:16). The Mosaic Law could not provide eternal salvation for men (Gal. 3:21-26). The Mosaic Law could not provide the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:3). The Mosaic Law could not solve the problems of the old sin nature (Rom. 8:2-3). The nation of Israel was characterized by God as being stiff-necked (Jer. 17:23). They were hardened and obstinate (Ezek. 3:7).

If the nation was to experience the blessings of the covenant they would need forgiveness for their sins, they would need to be regenerated (born-again), a new heart characterized by obedience, and empowerment from the Holy Spirit. A covenant that guarantees Israel these divine provisions is given in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Within the original Abrahamic Covenant were promises concerning the following: (1) Land: Palestinian Covenant developed the land promises to Israel. (2) Seed: Davidic Covenant developed the seed promises to Israel. (3) Blessings: New Covenant developed the blessing promises of the original Abrahamic Covenant.
The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel have a great deal to say about these blessings that will flow from the New Covenant, which they speak of often. In spite of the disobedience of the nation, this covenant necessitates the continuation of the nation. Even continued disobedience cannot remove Israel from her covenanted position (Jer. 31:34-35). Further the nation is promised a restoration to the land (Jer. 32:37; 33:11; Ezek. 11:17; 36:28-35; 37:21-22, 25). The prophets speak of the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Jer. 31:38-40). The temple will be rebuilt (Ezek. 37:27-28). The blessings the nation of Israel will receive are based on the New Covenant (Isa. 61:8-9; Hos. 2:18-20). The greatest blessing in this covenant is that of being brought in close relationship with God (Jer. 30:22; 31:33; 32:38-41; Ezek. 11:20; 34:25-27; 37:27).

We must reiterate that these 4 unconditional covenants (Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and New) are all related to Israel and not the church. The church has not been given covenants but rather the Baptism of the Spirit. Rom 9:1-5, “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, {separated} from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the {temple} service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

**Distinctions Between Israel and the Church:**

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There are 7 great features that are distinct in each of these unconditional covenants to Israel: (1) Israel will be a nation forever. (2) Israel will possess a significant portion of land forever. (3) Israel will have a King ruler over her forever. (4) Israel will have a throne from which Christ will ruler, forever. (5) Israel will have a kingdom forever.

God will make a New Covenant with them in the future. As a result of this New Covenant, there will be abiding blessings.

The New Covenant with Israel was based upon the voluntary substitutionary spiritual death of the impeccable humanity of Christ in hypostatic union. **Luke 22:20**, “And in the same way {He took} the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.” **1 Cor 11:25**, “In the same way {He took} the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink {it}, in remembrance of Me.” The Lord Jesus Christ is the mediator of this New Covenant to Israel. **Heb 12:24a**, “and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.”