

God IS Covenant Keeping

As we have seen repeatedly throughout Scripture, holiness works through the Lord's entire character. Holiness ensures uniformity and equity throughout God's actions and reactions with His creation. Therefore, moral integrity is central in all interactions between God and humanity. Likewise, integrity in all agreements made between Yahweh and mankind is guaranteed by virtue of His holy nature. Which is precisely what we see when looking at covenants in Scripture.

A covenant is a strong and formal agreement between two parties, much like a contract. A covenant has regulations, obligations, and promises which both parties must abide by.

The Bible records many covenants, particularly throughout the Old Testament. Some are between people, and others are between God and people, but the serious nature of a covenant remains the same. For the purposes of this lesson, we shall focus on covenants between God and man.

Most covenants found in the Bible are unconditional, meaning that once the covenant is formally established, the covenant must be fulfilled. These are called everlasting

covenants; they are unchanging by nature and inalterable in their absolute fulfilment. These unconditional covenants are the Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants.

Scripture also records one conditional, or temporary covenant, which is the Mosaic covenant. The blessings of this covenant were conditional upon Israel's obedience to the Law. Likewise, the judgements of this covenant were also the result of disobedience to the Law.

We call these *“biblical covenants”* because they are plainly stated in Scripture for all to read. These covenants require no imagination and use clear language to communicate God's intentions. Understanding biblical covenants highlights God's righteousness and dependability. He always remains faithful and unchanging to His Word, and we see this especially in His covenants with Israel and mankind. Solomon declared in 1 Kings 8:23, *“O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart.”*

Following is a brief summary of some of the main biblical covenants.

The Noahic Covenant

The word “covenant” (Heb. *berit*) is first found in Genesis 6:18, where God says to Noah, *“I will establish my covenant with you.”* This was the first biblical covenant, and it was established with Noah as an unconditional and *“everlasting covenant”* (Gen 9:16), which is still in effect today.

In this covenant, God promises to provide certainty within nature; *“while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease”* (Gen 8:22). This promise guarantees stability of the natural world, enabling humanity to continue living without the threat of global or total catastrophe.

“While the earth remains” mankind can depend upon the seasonal cycles. This promise by God extends its blessings through all creation including the climate, the planet, the plants, *“every living creature... the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth”* (Gen 9:10). In Genesis 9:11-13, God states His promise of the covenant; *“I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”*¹² *And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every*

*living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³
I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the
covenant.”*

The effects of this covenant meant that blessings would impact all of creation. Noah and his sons are told to *“multiply and fill the earth”* (Gen 9:1, 7). God also caused animals, birds, and fish to fear mankind (Gen 9: 2). God then provided all living animals as food for mankind, just He had provided plants for food in the beginning. The only stipulation was that humans are not to eat meat with blood in it (Gen 9:3-4). Lastly, God affirms human life to be sacred; neither man nor animal is to kill a human being (Gen. 9:5-6) *“for God made man in his own image.”*

The unconditional and eternal Noahic covenant serves as a foundation on which God’s kingdom and His plan of salvation are to be worked out. This covenant sits as the foundation for the future biblical covenants to follow with a rainbow in the sky to remind us.

The Abrahamic Covenant

God’s covenant with Abraham is found in the promises of Genesis 12:2-3. *“I will make of you a great nation, and I will*

bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ *I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* From Abraham, God would:

- ~ Make a great nation (Israel).
- ~ Make the name of Abraham great.
- ~ Bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who dishonour Abraham.
- ~ And *“in you (Abraham) all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Further blessings within the Abrahamic covenant are declared through Genesis chapters 12-15. They include promised land (Gen 12:-7; 13:14-17) as a forever inheritance which God later specified in Genesis 15:18-21. God further promised to protect and reward Abraham (Gen 15:1) and make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the night sky (Gen 15:5).

God then ratifies His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:7-17, where God passes through divided animal carcasses proclaiming His promises to signify His unconditional commitment to fulfill this covenant regardless of how Abraham lives.

Through this covenant God promised that Abraham would have numerous descendants and be *“the father of a multitude of nations”* and *“kings shall come from”* him (Gen 17:5-6). This pointed forward to the coming Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:12-16.

“Importantly, while the covenants primarily focus on Israel, they are not restricted to Israel nor seen as applying only to Israel. As Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 reveal, it was God’s intent to include Gentiles in the covenant promises. Paul affirms this in Galatians 3:7-9, where he links Gentile salvation in the church to what God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 concerning blessings to Gentiles.”

(John MacArthur, Richard Mayhue, Biblical Doctrine Crossway.)

The Abrahamic covenant affirms that people of all cultures and ethnicity shall be saved through faith, just as Abraham was (Gen 15:6). It also affirms that the ethnic identity of Jew and Gentile shall be preserved within the body of God’s saved people.

The Mosaic Covenant

God introduced His law through Moses and formed the Mosaic covenant. The Lord called out to Moses His message for Israel; *“if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my*

covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples" (Exodus 19:5). This is the only conditional covenant God made with Israel which was dependent upon their obedience.

This Mosaic covenant was for Israel only (Exo 19:3), it included 613 commandments of which the 10 commandments were a summary set (Exo 20:1-17). God included the rules for Israel's social living (Exo 21-23) and their system of worship (Exo 25-31). The sign of this covenant in Israel was their observance of the sabbath (Exo 31:16-17).

The Mosaic covenant could not save Israel from their sin, and it did not offer salvation. But it did show Israel how Yahweh wanted them to live as a loving, faithful, and worshipping community of God's chosen people.

While many wrongly interpret the Mosaic covenant given to Israel, it remains righteous and good for the purpose for which God gave it to Israel (Rom 7:12). The apostle Paul writes extensively in his letter to the Roman believers, explaining the blessings and the limitations of the Mosaic Law.

- The Law gives us knowledge of what sin is (Rom 3:20).

- The Law shows us that as sin increases, God's grace increases all the more (Rom 5:20).
- From the Law's inability to offer salvation, Paul explains that *"the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law"* (Rom 3:21). As Paul continued to explain, *"the righteousness of God (comes) through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe"* (Romans 3:22). Righteousness could NEVER be earned through obeying the Law. The Law was never intended to produce salvation.

While God was faithful to the Mosaic covenant, Israel broke the Mosaic covenant. Therefore, God promised to surpass it with a new and better covenant. *"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah"* (Jeremiah 31:31). Christ's death brought an end to the Mosaic covenant and its compulsory laws (Eph 2:13-15). Thus, believers in Jesus Christ are NOT under the Mosaic covenant. Through His death on the Cross, Jesus Christ *"abolished the law of commandments expressed in ordinances"* (Ephesians 2:15).

The Davidic Covenant

The Davidic Covenant is another unconditional and everlasting covenant. The central passage detailing God's promises is 2 Samuel 7:12-16. *"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."*

Observations:

- David's son, Solomon, will establish this kingdom (:12).
- Solomon would build God's house, the temple (:13).
- God would establish Solomon's kingdom forever (:13).
- God would be a father to Solomon. When Solomon disobeyed, God would discipline him but would not take the kingdom from him as he did with Saul (:14-15).

- David's kingdom dynasty will endure through Solomon and forever with the throne of David established forever (:16).

Although 2 Samuel chapter 7 does not use the word 'covenant,' the word does appear in Psalm 89:3-4. *"You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ⁴ 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'"*

In the gospel records of the New Testament, Jesus appears as the Son of David. Matthew 1:1, *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David..."* (see also Mat 9:27; 15:22; 21:15). Acts 13:34-37 testifies that resurrected Jesus is the fulfilment of the Davidic promise. Acts 13:34, *"as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'"* In Revelation 3:7, *"the angel of the church in Philadelphia"* identified Jesus as *"the true one, who has the key of David."* Revelation 22:16 again identifies Jesus as *"the root and the descendant of David."*

Although Jesus' first coming fulfilled some of the Davidic covenant promises of the coming King, there are other promises awaiting future fulfilment at His second coming. Through faith in Christ, God *"has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son"* (Colossians 1:13). New Testament inclusion of Gentiles into salvation and the Kingdom is evidence of Davidic covenant fulfilment waiting for its ultimate fulfilment. Matthew 25:31-32, *"when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations."* In Jesus' glorious second coming He shall literally sit upon the throne of David in His literal Millennial earthly Kingdom. Jesus explaining these future realities to His disciples said, *"truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"* (Matthew 19:28).

Just as we read and accept the historic fulfilment of Jesus in the David Covenant, so we look to sovereign God to bring final and ultimate fulfilment for King Jesus in the future fulfilment of the Davidic covenant.

The New Covenant

The “*New covenant*” is first spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-34, where God promises Israel to forgive their sin and have an intimate and unbroken relationship with His people. While the promise was first made to Israel, it was later extended to every person who comes to Jesus Christ in faith (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15).

This new covenant is unconditional and eternal in nature. It's in this new covenant that God initiates and empowers his people of faith, regardless of ethnicity, to love Him, to serve Him, and to remain faithful to Him while enjoying His blessings. Under the New covenant, people are motivated to obey God by their love for Him and not by an external threat of punishment if they disobey.

God the Holy Spirit is now the enabler, empowering people to do what they could never do under the Law. *“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”*²⁷ *And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules”* (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The New covenant is a life changing, present reality, with future certainty for both Israel and the Church. The New covenant does NOT make Israel redundant; it does NOT cause the Church to replace Israel, and it does NOT mean that the Church has absorbed Israel into itself. Ethnic Israel never loses her God appointed identity as unique from the New Testament Church.

Paul builds on Isaiah 59:20 when he teaches in Romans 11:26-27 *“And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; ²⁷ and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”*

While New Testament Gentile believers cannot become part of ethnic Israel, a born again Jew does become part of the Church.

Covenant Theology

Some teachers argue that there are three covenants that were made between the members of the Godhead before the first recorded covenant with Noah. They call these three covenants, the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace.

These get called '*theological covenants*' because they cannot be found in the text of Scripture. Theological covenants are dependent upon the student's thinking and perceptions of spiritual matters. This line of thinking grants the student a great deal of authority over Scripture in order to claim the existence of covenants which do not actually exist in God's Word. Therefore, they are disqualified from being grouped with "*biblical covenants*" and do not meet the normal definition of the term 'covenant.'

Conclusion

Biblical covenants show us the righteous and faithful nature of God in action over long periods of time and through multiple generations of His people. They show us that, just as God is unchangeable, so his promises are unchanging.

The covenants God made with man give evidence that just as the Lord literally fulfills His promises of judgement upon sin, so He literally fulfills His promises of blessings. Israel presently awaits their literal fulfilment of all remaining covenant promises. That time will come when King Jesus reigns over the Millennial Kingdom.

All of God's promises are based on who He is and His plan for the world. Therefore, it is with confidence that we look to the Lord to fulfill all remaining components of His covenant with Israel and with His Church that have not yet reached their literal and ultimate fulfillment.