

## cov·e·nant

1. an agreement, usually formal, between two or more persons to do or not do some thing specified.

2. *Law*. an incidental clause in such an agreement.

3. *Ecclesiastical*. a solemn agreement between the members of a church to act together in harmony with the precepts of the gospel.

*Bible*. a. the conditional promises made to humanity by God, as revealed in Scripture.

b. the agreement between God and the ancient Israelites, in which God promised to protect them if they kept His law and were faithful to Him.

## What are the covenants in the Bible?"

**Answer:** The Bible speaks of seven different covenants, four of which (Abrahamic, Palestinian, Mosaic, Davidic) God made with the nation of Israel and are unconditional in nature. That is, regardless of Israel's obedience or disobedience, God still will fulfill these covenants with Israel. One of the covenants, the Mosaic Covenant, is conditional in nature. That is, this covenant will bring either blessing or cursing depending on Israel's obedience or disobedience. Three of the covenants (Adamic, Noahic, New) are made between God and mankind in general, and are not limited to the nation of Israel.

The Adamic Covenant can be thought of in two parts: the Edenic Covenant (innocence) and the Adamic Covenant (grace) (Genesis 3:16-19). The Edenic Covenant is found in Genesis 1:26-30; 2:16-17. The Edenic Covenant outlined man's responsibility toward creation and God's directive regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Adamic Covenant included the curses pronounced against mankind for the sin of Adam and Eve, as well as God's provision for that sin (Genesis 3:15).

The Noahic Covenant was an unconditional covenant between God and Noah (specifically) and humanity (generally). After the Flood, God promised humanity that He would never again destroy all life on earth with a Flood (see Genesis chapter 9). God gave the rainbow as the sign of the covenant, a promise that the entire earth would never again flood and a reminder that God can and will judge sin (2 Peter 2:5).



Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3, 6-7; 13:14-17; 15; 17:1-14; 22:15-18). In this covenant, God promised many things to Abraham. He personally promised that He would make Abraham's name great (Genesis 12:2), that Abraham would have numerous physical descendants (Genesis 13:16), and that he would be the father of a multitude of nations (Genesis 17:4-5). God also made promises regarding a nation called Israel. In fact, the geographical boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant are laid out on more than one occasion in the book of Genesis (12:7; 13:14-15; 15:18-21). Another provision in the Abrahamic Covenant is that the families of the world will be blessed through the physical line of Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). This is a reference to the Messiah, who would come from the line of Abraham.

Palestinian Covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). The Palestinian Covenant amplifies the land aspect that was detailed in the Abrahamic Covenant. According to the terms of this covenant, if the people disobeyed, God would cause them to be scattered around the world (Deuteronomy 30:3-4), but He would eventually restore the nation (verse 5). When the nation is restored, then they will obey Him perfectly (verse 8), and God will cause them to prosper (verse 9).

Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 11; et al.). The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant that either brought God's direct blessing for obedience or God's direct cursing for disobedience upon the nation of Israel. Part of the Mosaic Covenant was the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and the rest of the Law, which contained over 600 commands—roughly 300 positive and 300 negative. The history books of the Old Testament (Joshua–Esther) detail how Israel succeeded at obeying the Law or how Israel failed miserably at obeying the Law. Deuteronomy 11:26-28 details the blessing/cursing motif.

Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:8-16). The Davidic Covenant amplifies the “seed” aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant. The promises to David in this passage are significant. God promised that David's lineage would last forever and that his kingdom would never pass away permanently (verse 16). Obviously, the Davidic throne has not been in place at all times. There will be a time, however, when someone from the line of David will again sit on the throne and rule as king. This future king is Jesus (Luke 1:32-33).

New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The New Covenant is a covenant made first with the nation of Israel and, ultimately, with all mankind. In the New Covenant, God promises to forgive sin, and there will be a universal knowledge of the Lord.



Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law of Moses ([Matthew 5:17](#)) and create a new covenant between God and His people. Now that we are under the New Covenant, both Jews and Gentiles can be free from the penalty of the Law. We are now given the opportunity to receive salvation as a free gift ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)).

Within the discussion of the biblical covenants, there are a few issues that Christians are not agreed upon. First, some Christians think that all of the covenants are conditional in nature. If the covenants are conditional, then Israel failed miserably at fulfilling them. Others believe that the unconditional covenants have yet to be totally fulfilled and, regardless of Israel's disobedience, will come to fruition sometime in the future. Second, how does the church of Jesus Christ relate to the covenants? Some believe that the church fulfills the covenants and God will never deal with Israel again. This is called replacement theology and has little scriptural evidence. Others believe that the church initially or partially will fulfill these covenants. While many of the promises towards Israel are still in the future, many believe that the church shares in the covenants in some way. Others believe that the covenants are for Israel and for Israel alone, and that the church has no part in these covenants.

### **Question: "What is the Abrahamic Covenant?"**

**Answer:** A covenant is an agreement between two parties. There are two types of covenants: conditional and unconditional. A conditional or bilateral covenant is an agreement that is binding on both parties for its fulfillment. Both parties agree to fulfill certain conditions. If either party fails to meet their responsibilities, the covenant is broken and neither party has to fulfill the expectations of the covenant. An unconditional or unilateral covenant is an agreement between two parties, but only one of the two parties has to do something. Nothing is required of the other party.

The Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. God made promises to Abraham that required nothing of Abraham. [Genesis 15:18-21](#) describes a part of the Abrahamic Covenant, specifically dealing with the dimensions of the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants.



The actual Abrahamic Covenant is found in [Genesis 12:1-3](#). The ceremony recorded in Genesis 15 indicates the unconditional nature of the covenant. The only time that both parties of a covenant would pass between the pieces of animals was when the fulfillment of the covenant was dependent upon both parties keeping commitments. Concerning the significance of God alone moving between the halves of the animals, it is to be noted that it is a smoking furnace and a flaming torch, representing God, not Abraham, which passed between the pieces. Such an act, it would seem, should be shared by both parties, but in this case it is doubtless to be explained by the fact that the covenant is principally a promise by God. He is the one who binds Himself. God caused a sleep to fall upon Abraham so that he would not be able to pass between the two halves of the animals. Fulfillment of the covenant fell to God alone.

God determined to call out a special people for Himself through whom He would bring blessing to all the nations. The Abrahamic Covenant is paramount to a proper understanding of the kingdom concept and is foundational to Old Testament theology. (1) The Abrahamic Covenant is described in [Genesis 12:1–3](#) and is an unconditional covenant. There are no conditions attached to it (no “if” clauses, suggesting its fulfillment is dependent on man). (2) It is also a literal covenant in which the promises should be understood literally. The land that is promised should be understood in its literal or normal interpretation—it is not a figure of heaven. (3) It is also an everlasting covenant. The promises that God made to Israel are eternal.

There are three main features to the Abrahamic Covenant:

1. The promise of land ([Genesis 12:1](#)). God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to a land that He would give him ([Genesis 12:1](#)). This promise is reiterated in [Genesis 13:14–18](#) where it is confirmed by a shoe covenant; its dimensions are given in [Genesis 15:18–21](#) (precluding any notion of this being fulfilled in heaven). The land aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is also expanded in [Deuteronomy 30:1–10](#), which is the [Palestinian Covenant](#).

2. The promise of descendants ([Genesis 12:2](#)). God promised Abraham that He would make a great nation out of him. Abraham, who was 75 years old and childless ([Genesis 12:4](#)), was promised many descendants. This promise is amplified in [Genesis 17:6](#) where God promised that nations and kings would descend from the aged patriarch. This promise (which is expanded in the [Davidic Covenant](#) of [2 Samuel 7:12–16](#)) would eventuate in the Davidic throne with



Messiah's kingdom rule over the Hebrew people.

3. The promise of blessing and redemption ([Genesis 12:3](#)). God promised to bless Abraham and the families of the earth through him. This promise is amplified in the [New Covenant](#) ([Jeremiah 31:31–34](#); cf. [Hebrews 8:6–13](#)) and has to do with “Israel’s spiritual blessing and redemption.” [Jeremiah 31:34](#) anticipates the forgiveness of sin. The unconditional and eternal nature of the covenant is seen in that the covenant is reaffirmed to Isaac ([Genesis 21:12](#); [26:3–4](#)). The “I will” promises suggest the unconditional aspect of the covenant. The covenant is further confirmed to Jacob ([Genesis 28:14–15](#)). It is noteworthy that God reaffirmed these promises amid the sins of the patriarchs, which fact further emphasizes the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant.

God’s method of fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant is literal, inasmuch as God partially fulfilled the covenant in history: God blessed Abraham by giving him the land ([Genesis 13:14–17](#)); God blessed him spiritually ([Genesis 13:8](#), [18](#); [14:22](#), [23](#); [21:22](#)); God gave him numerous descendants ([Genesis 22:17](#); [49:3–28](#)). The important element of the Abrahamic Covenant, however, demands a future fulfillment with Messiah’s kingdom rule:

(1) Israel as a nation will possess the land in the future. Numerous Old Testament passages anticipate the future blessing of Israel and her possession of the land as promised to Abraham. Ezekiel envisions a future day when Israel is restored to the land ([Ezekiel 20:33–37](#), [40–42](#); [36:1–37:28](#)).

(2) Israel as a nation will be converted, forgiven, and restored ([Romans 11:25–27](#)).

(3) Israel will repent and receive the forgiveness of God in the future ([Zechariah 12:10–14](#)). The Abrahamic Covenant finds its ultimate fulfillment in connection with the return of Messiah to rescue and bless His people Israel. It is through the nation Israel that God promised in [Genesis 12:1–3](#) to bless the nations of the world. That ultimate blessing will issue in the forgiveness of sins and Messiah’s glorious kingdom reign on earth.