

Major Bible Themes

52 Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures Simplified and Explained

Adapted from the book *Major Bible Themes*
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The Covenants

- Biblical vs. Theological Covenants
 - In addition to the covenants which are mentioned in the Bible theologians have advanced three “inferred” covenants...
 - ✦ A covenant of works with Adam in the garden which asserts that, if Adam had obeyed God’s prohibition, he would have lived forever.
 - ✦ A covenant between God the Father and God the Son whereby the Son agreed to provide the redemption for the salvation of mankind and the Father promised to accept His sacrifice.
 - ✦ A covenant of grace with Christ as the Mediator of the covenant and representative of those who put their trust in Him.
 - In order to preserve doctrinal clarity, we will focus our study on the covenants explicitly mentioned in Scripture.
- The Biblical Covenants
 - The covenants of God contained in Scripture fall into two distinct categories – conditional and unconditional.
 - ✦ A conditional covenant guarantees that God will do His part with absolute certainty when the human requirements are met, but if man fails God is not obligated to fulfill His covenant.
 - ✦ An unconditional covenant, while it may include some human contingencies, is a declaration of the purpose of God and the promises of an unconditional covenant will undoubtedly be fulfilled in God’s perfect time and in His perfect way.
 - Of the eight Biblical covenants, only the Edenic and Mosaic covenants are conditional in nature.
 - The Edenic Covenant was the first covenant that God made with man (Gen 1:26-31; 2:16-17).
 - ✦ Adam was given the responsibility of subduing the earth, having dominion over the animals, and caring for the garden.
 - ✦ He was also prohibited from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
 - ✦ This was a conditional covenant because God would give either life and blessing or death and cursing depending upon the faithfulness of Adam (and Eve).

- ✦ Because Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, the penalty of death for their disobedience was imposed (spiritual death, then physical).
- The Adamic Covenant was made with man after the fall (Gen 3:15-19).
 - ✦ This was a unconditional covenant because God declared with certainty what man's new conditions and circumstances would be once the fall of man had occurred.
 - A coming Redeemer is promised (Gen 3:15).
 - The woman is promised pain in childbirth (Gen 3:16).
 - The headship of the man is declared (Gen 3:16).
 - The man is promised that producing food will now be difficult, requiring toil and the sweat of his brow (Gen 3:17-19).
 - Man/woman learn that they will face physical death (Gen 3:19).
- The Noahic Covenant was made with Noah, his descendants, and all flesh that is on the earth (Gen 9:1-18).
 - ✦ In the giving of this covenant the normal order of nature is reaffirmed (Gen 8:22; 9:2).
 - ✦ Man is given permission to eat the flesh of animals (Gen 9:3-4).
 - ✦ Human government is established as a means to curb sin with man receiving authority from God to execute capital punishment (Gen 9:5-6).
 - ✦ The command to be fruitful and multiply is restated (Gen 9:1, 7).
 - ✦ God promised that He would never again cut off all flesh by flood and never again destroy the earth by flood (Gen 9:8-18).
- The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8) is one of the great revelations of God concerning future history and in it profound promises were given along three lines.
 - ✦ Land – The descendants of Abraham would possess a specific land given to them by God (Gen 12:1; 13:14-15, 17; 15:7; 17:8).
 - ✦ Seed – Abraham would have innumerable descendants (Gen 13:16; 15:5) and be the father of many nations (Gen 17:4-6).
 - ✦ Blessing – This included temporal blessings for Abraham and his descendants – through Isaac and Ishmael (Gen 17:20; 21:12-13) – as well as spiritual blessings for all the peoples of the world through Abraham's "seed" (Gen 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Gal 3:16).
 - ✦ Because of Israel's special relationship to God, God made a promise to the Gentiles, that cursing would come to those who curse Israel and blessing to those who bless Israel (Gen 12:3).
 - ✦ Like the Adamic and Noahic Covenants which came before, this covenant is unconditional.

- ✦ Even though many generations of Israelites did not enjoy the provisions of this covenant due to their disobedience, God will ultimately fulfill every single aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant.
- The Mosaic Covenant was given through Moses for the children of Israel in the wilderness (Ex 20:1 – 31:18).
 - ✦ God gave Moses the Law that was to govern His relationship to the people of Israel.
 - ✦ The Law includes the commandments (Ex 20:1-26), the judgments (Ex 21:1 – 24:11), and the ordinances (Ex 24:12 – 31:18).
 - ✦ This covenant was inherently conditional because blessings were promised to Israel based upon obedience whereas cursing and discipline would come to Israel if they were disobedient (Deut 28).
 - ✦ This covenant was also temporary and will be replaced by the New Covenant with Israel (Heb 8:7-13).
- The Palestinian (Land) Covenant was given concerning Israel’s ultimate possession of the promised land (Deut 30:1-5).
 - ✦ This covenant highlights how an unconditional covenant has conditional elements for any particular generation.
 - Because of disobedience and failure, the people of Israel spent many years in slavery in Egypt.
 - By the grace of God Israel was brought out of Egypt and they were able to take possession of a portion of the promised land.
 - Because of disobedience and disregard for God’s Law, the people of Israel were removed from the land during both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.
 - Again by the grace of God they were allowed to return to the land 70 years after being taken captive by the Babylonians.
 - The Israelites repossessed the land and remained there until Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.
 - The return to the land in the present nation of Israel is not the fulfillment of God’s promise, but it will take place when Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom (Ezek 39:25-29).
 - ✦ Therefore this covenant includes...
 - Dispersion of Israel for their unbelief and disobedience (Deut 28:63-68; 30:1).
 - Times of repentance and restoration (Deut 30:2).
 - The ultimate re-gathering of Israel into the Promised Land (Deut 30:3-5; Isa 11:11-12; Jer 30:3).
 - ✦ This covenant reaffirms the “land” aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant.

- The Davidic Covenant was given to David concerning his royal lineage, throne and kingdom (2 Sam 7:8-16; 1 Chr 17:3-14).
 - ✦ This is an eternal, unconditional covenant which God will fulfill, although David's descendants would suffer loss of reign due to divine discipline for their disobedience (Ps 89:20-37).
 - ✦ This covenant reaffirms the "seed" aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant (Ps 18:50), while adding the promise of an everlasting throne (Ps 89:36), an everlasting King (Jer 33:21) and an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7:16; 1 Chr 17:14).
 - ✦ Jesus Christ, Son of David (Lk 18:38-39), will fulfill this promise when He returns to reign on David's throne forever (Lk 1:31-33).
 - ✦ Jesus Christ sitting on His throne in heaven today does not fulfill this promise because David occupied an earthly throne which Jesus will sit upon when He returns to the earth (Matt 25:31).
 - ✦ When Jesus Christ rules over Israel in the Millennial Kingdom, the resurrected David will serve under Him as prince (Ezek 34:23-24).
 - ✦ The Davidic Covenant is one of keys to understanding the future plans of God in establishing His earthly kingdom as He brings to fulfillment the promises which He made to Abraham.
- The New Covenant is with the people of Israel (Jer 31:31-33).
 - ✦ It is an unconditional covenant, unlike the Mosaic Covenant which was broken by the people of Israel (Jer 31:32).
 - ✦ In His infinite grace, God promises to write His word on the hearts of all the sons of Israel and they will be faithful to Him (Jer 31:33).
 - ✦ All of Israel will finally know the Lord as they should (Jer 31:34).
 - ✦ The New Covenant is not made with the Church, although we are servant-ministers of this covenant (2 Cor 3:6).
 - This is a ministry of the Spirit and righteousness (2 Cor 3:8-9).
 - As we minister to one another now we are being trained for our ministry as the Bride of Christ during the Millennial Kingdom.
 - ✦ The New Covenant has its very basis in the blood of Jesus Christ (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) who is the Mediator of this covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24).
 - ✦ This covenant reaffirms the "blessing" aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant by assuring the future salvation of the people of Israel (Ezek 37:23; Rom 11:26-27).
- As we have examined the Biblical covenants we have seen how critical it is to distinguish between the conditional covenants of God which highlight man's failure and the unconditional covenants of God which highlight His sovereignty.

- Questions
 - Why is it preferable to view history through the eight Biblical covenants rather than from the viewpoint of the so-called theological covenants?
 - Distinguish between the conditional covenants and the unconditional covenants.
 - What was the Edenic Covenant and what was the result of man's failure under it?
 - What was the Adamic Covenant and to what extent does it condition our life today?
 - What were some important provisions of the Noahic Covenant and to what extent does it continue today?
 - What promises were given to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant?
 - What promises were given to the people of Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant?
 - What promises were given to the entire world in the Abrahamic Covenant?
 - To what extent was the covenant with Abraham unconditional?
 - To what extent was the Mosaic Covenant conditional and temporary?
 - To what extent was the Palestinian (Land) Covenant unconditional?
 - How do you explain the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities and Israel's worldwide dispersion in view of the unconditional character of the Palestinian Covenant?

- Summarize the overall provisions of the Palestinian Covenant in relation to Israel's disobedience, restoration and re-gathering.

- What was promised unconditionally in the Davidic Covenant?

- How does the Davidic Covenant relate to the future Millennial Kingdom?

- According to the Old Testament, what is provided in the New Covenant for Israel?

- When will the New Covenant be fulfilled for Israel?

- How does the New Covenant relate to the future salvation of Israel?

- How do the unconditional covenants of God relate to the sovereignty of God?

- How do the unconditional covenants of God relate to the faithfulness of God?

- How do the unconditional covenants of God relate to the security of the believer's salvation?