

Biblical Covenants: A Comprehensive Study Guide

Distinguishing the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New, and other major covenants

Purpose and interpretive caution

This guide distinguishes the major divine covenants so that the ending of one covenant—especially the Mosaic/Old Covenant—is not mistakenly treated as the cancellation of every promise God made to Abraham, Israel, David, or participants in the New Covenant. Scripture itself distinguishes these covenants (for example, Galatians 3:15–18; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:6–13; Romans 9–11).

Important: Christians disagree about how some unfulfilled or consummating promises relate to ethnic/national Israel, the Church, the millennial kingdom, and the new creation. The status column below states the textual case and flags major interpretive disputes rather than presenting a modern political conclusion as though it were itself Scripture.

Master comparison

Covenant	Beginning / key texts	Parties	Core provisions	Duration / status	Relevance today
Edenic / Creation arrangement	Gen. 1:26–30; 2:15–17	God and Adam/humanity	Image-bearing, dominion, fruitfulness, stewardship; prohibition concerning the tree; death for disobedience.	The Eden probation was broken in Gen. 3. Some theologians call this a covenant; Scripture does not explicitly use the word covenant here.	Creation order, human dignity, work, marriage, stewardship, sin and death remain foundational.
Adamic / post-Fall promise	Gen. 3:14–19, especially 3:15	God addresses serpent, woman and Adam; consequences extend to humanity	Judgment after the Fall; conflict between serpent and woman's seed; hope of the serpent's ultimate defeat.	Judgments continue in the fallen age. Gen. 3:15 is understood by Christians as ultimately fulfilled in Christ, with final victory consummated at the end.	Foundational for sin, suffering, death and the trajectory toward redemption.
Noahic	Gen. 6:18; 8:20–22; 9:1–17	God, Noah, his descendants, and every living creature	Preservation of the earth; no universal destruction by flood; human life protected; rainbow as sign.	Ongoing. Gen. 9 repeatedly describes it as an everlasting covenant.	Applies broadly to humanity and creation.
Abrahamic	Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–21; 22:15–18; confirmed to Isaac/Jacob: Gen. 26:2–5; 28:10–15	God and Abraham; covenant extends through the promised seed	Seed/descendants, nation, land, blessing, kings; blessing to all families/nations; covenant relationship.	Not canceled by the Mosaic Law: Gal. 3:17 explicitly says the Law 430 years later cannot disannul the prior promise. Christ is the promised Seed in Gal. 3:16. Debate remains over the precise future fulfillment of national/land aspects.	Central to justification by faith (Rom. 4; Gal. 3), Christ, Gentile blessing, and the Israel question.
Mosaic / Sinaitic / Old Covenant	Ex. 19–24; Ex. 20; Ex. 24:3–8; Deut. 5; 27–30	God and the nation Israel delivered from Egypt	Law at Sinai; covenantal national order; priesthood/sacrificial worship; blessings for obedience and curses for	As the governing Old Covenant, superseded by the New Covenant. Jer. 31:31–34 predicts a covenant 'not according to' the	The Mosaic covenant is not the Christian's governing covenant, but the Law remains inspired Scripture, revealing God's holiness, sin,

			disobedience.	Exodus covenant; Heb. 8:13 calls the first old/obsolete; 2 Cor. 3 contrasts old and new covenant ministries.	redemptive patterns, and pointing to Christ.
Priestly / Phinehas	Num. 25:10–13; cf. Jer. 33:17–22	God and Phinehas/descendants	Covenant of peace and priesthood in response to Phinehas's zeal.	The Levitical order belonged to Israel's old-covenant administration. Hebrews presents Christ's Melchizedek priesthood and once-for-all sacrifice as superior and definitive (Heb. 7–10).	Important for understanding priesthood, holiness, atonement, and Christ's superior priesthood.
Land / Deuteronomic covenant (classification disputed)	Deut. 29:1; 30:1–10; compare Gen. 15:18–21	God and Israel	Dispersion after disobedience; return, restoration, heart change, blessing, possession of land.	Some dispensational interpreters treat Deut. 29–30 as a distinct covenant; others see it as Mosaic covenant renewal and/or development of Abrahamic land promises. Deut. 30 looks beyond exile toward restoration and heart transformation.	Highly relevant to debates about Israel's restoration, but it must be interpreted alongside the Abrahamic and New Covenants and the NT.
Davidic	2 Sam. 7:8–16; 1 Chr. 17:7–14; Ps. 89:3–4, 28–37; 132:11–18	God and David / Davidic dynasty	House, kingdom and throne; enduring Davidic line; ultimate royal Son.	Culminates in Jesus Christ, Son of David (Luke 1:31–33; Acts 2:29–36). Christ already reigns; Christians differ about the form/timing of the kingdom's future earthly manifestation.	Essential for understanding Jesus as Messiah/King and the kingdom of God.
New Covenant	Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:22–28; 37:21–28; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3; Heb. 8–10	Jeremiah names house of Israel and house of Judah; Jesus inaugurates the covenant in His blood; NT believers participate in its saving blessings	Forgiveness, law written on the heart, knowledge of God, cleansing, new heart, Spirit, restored relationship with God.	Inaugurated/ratified through Christ's death and presently operative. Final consummation remains future. Interpretive debate concerns how promises specifically naming Israel/Judah reach their complete fulfillment.	The governing redemptive covenant associated with Christ's blood; foundational to Christian salvation and life in the Spirit.

The crucial distinction: Abrahamic ≠ Mosaic

The argument can be stated in four steps:

1. God made promises to Abraham before Sinai: descendants/seed, nation, land, blessing, and worldwide blessing (Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22).
2. The Mosaic covenant was made centuries later with Israel after the Exodus (Exodus 19–24). It established Israel's covenantal life under the Law.
3. Paul explicitly says the later Law could not cancel the earlier promise: “the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul” (Galatians 3:17 KJV).

4. Therefore, the New Testament's declaration that the Old/Mosaic covenant is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13) does not, by itself, prove that every Abrahamic promise has been canceled.

What exactly ended?

The covenant most clearly described in the New Testament as old and superseded is the covenant made when God brought Israel out of Egypt—the Mosaic/Sinaitic covenant. Jeremiah 31:31–32 distinguishes the promised New Covenant from the covenant made with the fathers when God brought them out of Egypt. Hebrews 8 quotes that prophecy and concludes that by speaking of a New Covenant, God made the first old. Hebrews 9 further identifies the first covenant with Moses, its sanctuary, priestly service, blood, and covenantal rites.

This does not mean the Old Testament is irrelevant. It means Christians are not under the Mosaic covenant as their covenantal administration. The Law remains inspired and profitable (2 Timothy 3:16–17), reveals sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7), contains enduring moral revelation, provides redemptive types, and points to Christ.

Why Romans 9–11 matters after the Cross

Romans 9–11 was written after Christ's death and resurrection, yet Paul continues to discuss ethnic Israel as a distinguishable people in God's redemptive purposes. Romans 11:1 asks, "Hath God cast away his people?" and answers, "God forbid." Romans 11:25 describes a partial hardening of Israel "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," followed by 11:26, "And so all Israel shall be saved," and 11:28–29 speaks of Israel as beloved for the fathers' sakes because "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Interpretations of "all Israel" differ. A future-national-conversion reading understands Paul to predict a future large-scale turning of ethnic Israel to Christ. Other orthodox interpreters understand the passage differently. What is difficult to sustain from Romans 11 is the simple equation: "the Mosaic covenant ended, therefore God has no remaining purpose concerning the Jewish people."

Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the future-restoration question

Ezekiel 36:22–28 combines gathering/restoration language with cleansing, a new heart, a new spirit, and God's Spirit within His people. Ezekiel 37 joins restoration, the reunification of Judah and Israel, the Davidic ruler, and an everlasting covenant of peace. Jeremiah 31:31–37 promises the New Covenant to the house of Israel and the house of Judah and immediately follows with strong language about Israel's continuing identity before God.

These texts create a legitimate interpretive question: are the national/restoration elements fulfilled spiritually in Christ and the Church, literally in a future restored Israel, or through an already/not-yet pattern that includes both present New Covenant participation and future fulfillment for ethnic Israel? The document should not hide that debate; it should show exactly where it comes from.

Covenant-by-covenant study notes

Noahic Covenant

Start: Genesis 6:18; formally stated in Genesis 9. Sign: rainbow (Gen. 9:12–17). Scope includes Noah's descendants and every living creature. Nothing in the NT announces its cancellation. It establishes the stable created order in which redemptive history unfolds.

Abrahamic Covenant

Promise begins in Genesis 12 and is solemnly ratified in Genesis 15, expanded/confirmed in Genesis 17 and 22, then confirmed to Isaac and Jacob. Genesis 15 is especially important because God alone passes through the divided pieces while Abram is in a deep sleep. The covenant includes multiple strands—seed, land, nation, kings, personal blessing, and worldwide blessing. Galatians 3 identifies Christ as the climactic Seed and insists that Sinai did not annul the promise.

Mosaic Covenant

Begins after the Exodus at Sinai (Exodus 19–24). Exodus 24:7–8 explicitly calls the document the 'book of the covenant' and speaks of the 'blood of the covenant.' Its blessings/curses are developed especially in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–30. Jeremiah predicts a New Covenant unlike the Exodus covenant; Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant in His blood; Hebrews declares the first covenant old and explains the replacement of its sacrificial/priestly order by Christ.

Davidic Covenant

Established in 2 Samuel 7. God promises David a house/dynasty and an enduring throne/kingdom. The NT opens by identifying Jesus as Son of David (Matthew 1:1). Gabriel announces that God will give Jesus the throne of David and that His kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:32–33).

New Covenant

Promised explicitly in Jeremiah 31 and closely associated with Ezekiel's promises of cleansing, heart transformation and the Spirit. Jesus identifies His shed blood with the New Covenant (Luke 22:20). Hebrews 8–10 explains its superiority: better covenant, better priest, better sacrifice, complete forgiveness. It is inaugurated but awaits the final consummation of redemption.

Key passages to place side-by-side

- Genesis 15:1–21 — Abrahamic covenant ratification and land boundaries.
- Exodus 19:3–8; 24:3–8 — formation and ratification of the Mosaic covenant.
- Deuteronomy 28–30 — covenant blessings/curses, exile, return, and heart language.
- 2 Samuel 7:8–16 — Davidic house, throne, and kingdom.
- Jeremiah 31:31–37 — New Covenant plus Israel/Judah language.
- Ezekiel 36:22–28; 37:21–28 — restoration, regeneration, Spirit, Davidic king, everlasting covenant.
- Luke 22:20 — Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant in His blood.
- Galatians 3:15–18, 26–29 — Law does not annul Abrahamic promise; Christ as Seed; believers' participation in Abrahamic blessing.
- Hebrews 8:6–13; 9:15–28; 10:1–18 — Old/Mosaic covenant superseded by Christ and the New Covenant.
- Romans 9–11 — Israel, Gentiles, remnant, olive tree, partial hardening, future salvation question.

A concise teaching conclusion

Do not say merely, "God's covenant with Israel ended." Ask: Which covenant? The Mosaic covenant—the covenant made at the Exodus/Sinai—is explicitly described as old and superseded by the New Covenant. But the Abrahamic covenant preceded Sinai, and Galatians 3:17 expressly says the Mosaic Law could not annul the prior promise. The Davidic promises culminate in Christ, and the New Covenant is inaugurated in Christ. Romans 9–11 and the restoration passages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel require careful treatment before concluding that God has no future purpose for ethnic Israel. None of these theological conclusions, by themselves, grants blanket divine approval to any modern government or political policy.

Suggested teaching chart: questions to ask of every covenant

- Who are the covenant parties?
- What exactly does God promise or require?
- Is the covenant conditional, unconditional, or does it contain both unconditional promises and conditional enjoyment/blessings?
- What is its sign, if Scripture gives one?
- Does Scripture call it everlasting?
- Does a later biblical text explicitly cancel, supersede, transform, or reaffirm it?
- How is the covenant related to Christ?
- Does the NT apply its blessings to the Church?
- Does the text leave promises specifically concerning ethnic/national Israel awaiting fulfillment?
- What conclusions follow from the text—and what modern political conclusions do NOT automatically follow?

Selected research note

Standard covenant surveys commonly distinguish the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants, while some systems also separately identify Edenic/Adamic, Priestly, and Deuteronomic/Land covenants. The classification itself should therefore be distinguished from the biblical text: the safest method is to anchor every claimed covenant and its status in the passages listed above.