

The Covenants of God

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Promise upon promise, one unfolding plan

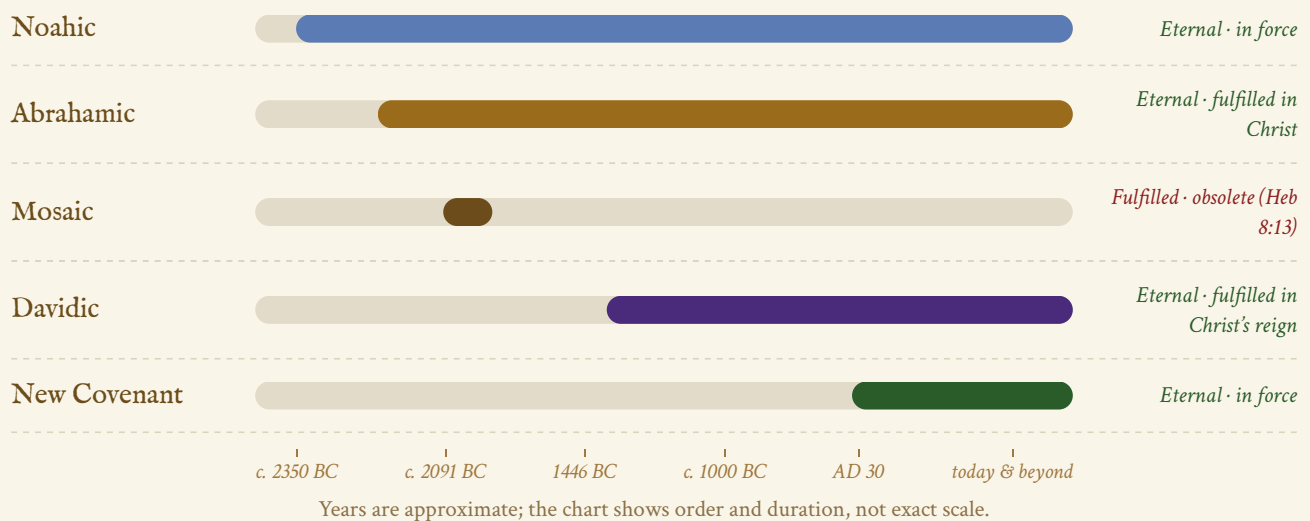
A covenant is a binding agreement that God Himself initiates and swears to. Through five major covenants — from the rainbow after the Flood to the bread and cup of the New Testament — God progressively reveals His plan to redeem mankind through one Person. Each covenant builds on the last. None is canceled until it is fulfilled.

What is a biblical covenant?

The Hebrew word is *berith*; the Greek is *diathēkē*. A biblical covenant is not a deal between equals — it is a sovereign promise God makes and binds Himself to keep. In every case below, God is the one who proposes the terms, swears the oath, and remains responsible for the fulfillment. Man's role is to receive, obey, and remember.

Each covenant has the same five elements: **parties** (with whom), **promise** (what is given), **conditions** (what is required of man, if anything), **sign** (the visible reminder), and **duration** (how long it stands). The cards below show all five for each covenant, with the New Testament's treatment of the fulfillment.

The Five Major Covenants · At a Glance



The Noahic Covenant

A promise to every living creature on the earth

c. 2350 BC · After the Flood, with Noah, his sons, and every creature on the earth · *Genesis 8:20–9:17*

PARTIES

God — with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature (Gen 9:9–10). The most universal of all the covenants.

SIGN

The rainbow in the cloud (Gen 9:13–17).
Whenever rain returns, the bow returns.

PROMISE

Never again to cut off all flesh by the waters of a flood; never again to destroy the earth by water (Gen 9:11, 15).

CONDITIONS

None — the covenant is unilateral. New commands are given (capital punishment, prohibition on blood) but the promise itself is unconditional.

DURATION

Perpetual. *For everlasting generations* (Gen 9:12).
Still in force today.

STATUS

In force. Every rainbow you see has been God's sign since the days of Noah.

After Noah and his family leave the ark, Noah builds an altar and offers burnt offerings. The Lord smells the soothing aroma and says *in His heart: I will never again curse the ground on account of man... nor will I ever again destroy every living thing*. Then He speaks aloud to Noah and his sons:

Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you... All flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.

— Genesis 9:9, 11

The Noahic covenant is unique in two ways. First, it extends to *every living creature* — not just Noah's family, not just one nation, not just believers. Birds, cattle, beasts, every creeping thing. Second, its sign — the rainbow — is a sign for God to remember, not for man to notice. Whenever the bow appears in the cloud, God says *I will remember My covenant* (Gen 9:15–16). Man may take the rainbow as evidence of God's faithfulness; but the bow is set in the heavens primarily as a reminder to God Himself, who needs no reminder, that He has bound Himself by oath.

IN FORCE TODAY

The Noahic covenant has never been fulfilled in the sense of being completed, because its terms are perpetual. The earth has never since been destroyed by water; that promise still stands. The next destruction Scripture foretells is by fire (2 Pet 3:7–10) — but that is not a violation of the Noahic promise; it is a different judgment, in a different element, at the end of the present order.

II

The Abrahamic Covenant

A nation, a land, and a blessing to all the families of the earth

c. 2091 BC and following · With Abram (later Abraham) and his descendants · *Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–14; 22:15–18*

PARTIES

God — with Abraham and his seed after him in their generations.

SIGN

Circumcision on the eighth day for every male in the household (Gen 17:10–14).

PROMISE (THREEFOLD)

Nation — descendants beyond counting. **Land** — Canaan, from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates. **Spiritual** — *in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed* (Gen 12:3; 22:18).

CONDITIONS

Walk before God and be blameless (Gen 17:1) — but the covenant itself is unilateral. In Gen 15 Abraham sleeps while God alone passes between the divided pieces. God swore by Himself (Gen 22:16; Heb 6:13).

DURATION

An everlasting covenant (Gen 17:7, 13, 19). Still in force.

STATUS

Fulfilled in Christ, ongoing for the people who belong to Christ. Two of the three promises (Nation and Land) were fulfilled by Joshua's day (Josh 21:43–45); the Spiritual promise is fulfilled in the gospel reaching the nations (Gal 3:8).

The covenant is given in three stages. In Genesis 12 the Lord calls Abram out of Ur and announces the threefold promise. In Genesis 15 He cuts the covenant by sacrifice — Abraham divides the animals; a smoking oven and a flaming torch pass between the pieces while Abraham sleeps. The point is unmissable: in the standard ancient covenant ceremony, both parties walked between the pieces, saying in effect *let me become as these if I break the covenant*. Here God alone passes between. The fulfillment of the covenant does not depend on Abraham's faithfulness. It depends on God's.

In Genesis 17 the covenant is sealed with the sign of circumcision — given to Abraham fourteen years after his call, twenty-five years after the first promise. Names are changed: Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of a multitude); Sarai to Sarah. Isaac is promised by name. In Genesis 22, after the binding of Isaac on Moriah, the Lord swears by Himself:

By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing... indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore... In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

— Genesis 22:16–18

Paul reads Galatians 3 in the light of this covenant: the gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham; the Seed singular (not seeds) is Christ; those who are of Christ are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. The third strand of the threefold promise — the Spiritual blessing to all nations — reaches its fulfillment when the gospel goes out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

THE TWO UNCONDITIONAL PILLARS

Hebrews 6:17–18 names this covenant explicitly as the *two unchangeable things* by which God demonstrates the immutability of His purpose: the promise itself, and the oath He swore on top of the promise. *God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath.* The Abrahamic covenant is the rock under everything that follows.

III

The Mosaic Covenant

The Law given at Sinai — conditional, temporary, fulfilled

1446 BC · With the nation of Israel through Moses · Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy 28–30

PARTIES

God — with the nation of Israel; mediated by Moses.

SIGN

The Sabbath (Ex 31:13, 16–17). Also the Law itself in two tablets of stone, deposited in the ark of the covenant.

PROMISE

Blessing for obedience, cursing for disobedience (Deut 28). *If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples* (Ex 19:5).

CONDITIONS

Strict obedience to the Ten Commandments and the entire Law — moral, civil, and ceremonial. Bilateral: *all that the Lord has spoken we will do* (Ex 24:3, 7).

DURATION

From Sinai until *the time of reformation* (Heb 9:10), when Christ would inaugurate the New.

STATUS

Fulfilled and obsolete. *When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete; but whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear* (Heb 8:13).

Sinai stands alone among the covenants for being explicitly *conditional*. *If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant... then you shall be My own possession*. The people swore obedience: *all that the Lord has spoken we will do*. Moses sprinkled half the blood on the altar, half on the people: *behold the blood of the covenant*. The terms were sealed.

The terms were also *broken* — within six weeks, by the people who had just sworn them, in the matter of the golden calf. The whole subsequent history of Israel is the story of God's faithfulness to a people who could not keep their own oath. Jeremiah at the end says it plainly: *they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God and worshipped other gods and served them* (Jer 22:9).

The Law was not a failed plan. Paul: *the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ* (Gal 3:24). It served three purposes: to expose sin (*through the Law comes the knowledge of sin*, Rom 3:20), to restrain wickedness (*added because of transgressions*, Gal 3:19), and to picture, in its sacrifices and priesthood and tabernacle, the Christ who would come (Heb 8–10). When Christ came and offered His one sacrifice for sins for all time, the work of the Law was complete. The blood of bulls and goats had never taken away sin; their function had always been to teach the need for the Lamb who would.

OBSOLETE – IN THE STRICT SENSE OF THE WORD

Hebrews 8:13 uses precisely the language of *obsolete* (Greek *pepalaiōken*): not erroneous, not useless, not bad — but old, used-up, finished. A receipt is obsolete the moment a debt is paid. The Mosaic covenant pictured what Christ accomplished; once He accomplished it, the picture no longer needed to be performed. The Tabernacle spoke shows this in more detail.

The Davidic Covenant

A house, a throne, a kingdom — forever

c. 1000 BC · With David and his line · 2 Samuel 7:8–16; 1 Chronicles 17:7–14; Psalm 89; 132

PARTIES

God — with David and his descendants forever.

SIGN

No explicit sign is given. The covenant is sworn by oath (Ps 89:3–4, 35–37; 132:11).

PROMISE (THREEFOLD)

House — David's descendants. **Throne** — eternal kingship. **Kingdom** — enduring before the Lord forever.

CONDITIONS

If a descendant sins, God will chasten him with the rod of men — but the covenant itself is not revocable (2 Sam 7:14–15).
Unconditional in substance, conditional in individual blessing.

DURATION

Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever (2 Sam 7:16). Eternal.

STATUS

Fulfilled and in force in Christ. Jesus, son of David, reigns now at the right hand of God (Acts 2:30–36) — and forever (Luke 1:32–33; Rev 11:15).

David, settled in his palace, says to Nathan the prophet: *I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.* Nathan blesses him: do what is in your heart. But that same night the word of the Lord comes to Nathan and reverses the plan. David will not build God a house. God will build David a house. The son of David will build the temple — and the line of David will rule forever:

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever... Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.

— 2 Samuel 7:12–16

Through the centuries the line was preserved against every threat. Athaliah tried to destroy all the royal seed (2 Kings 11); one baby, Joash, was hidden by Jehoiada the priest. Hezekiah's son Manasseh nearly extinguished the line by his apostasy; Josiah recovered it. The Babylonians took the last king, Zedekiah, in chains; Jeconiah was childless on the throne but had sons in exile (1 Chr 3:17–18). The line never died. When Gabriel came to Mary, he could say:

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.

— Luke 1:32–33

PETER AT PENTECOST

In his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:30–36), Peter reaches all the way back to David's covenant: David, being a prophet, knew God had sworn to seat one of his descendants on his throne; he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. *This Jesus God raised up... therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God... let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified.* The Davidic covenant is fulfilled not at the end of history but at Christ's exaltation. He reigns now.

V

The New Covenant

Forgiveness, the Spirit, and the Law written on the heart

Promised c. 600 BC; inaugurated AD 30 · With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — and through them with all who would come to Christ · *Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:24–27; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8–10*

PARTIES

God — with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, fulfilled in everyone who comes to Christ.

SIGN

The bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper. *This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood* (Luke 22:20). Also, the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:21–22; Eph 1:13–14).

PROMISE (FOURFOLD)

1. The law written on the heart (Jer 31:33). 2. Direct knowledge of God for all (Jer 31:34a). 3. Forgiveness of sins remembered no more (Jer 31:34b). 4. A new heart and the Spirit within (Ezek 36:26–27).

CONDITIONS

Faith in Christ (Rom 3:22; Heb 10:22), repentance, baptism, walking in newness of life. The covenant is unilateral in its establishment; participation is conditional on response.

DURATION

Eternal. *An eternal covenant* (Heb 13:20).

STATUS

Inaugurated at the cross; in force from Pentecost until Christ returns. This is the covenant under which the church now lives.

Six hundred years before Christ, Jeremiah — the weeping prophet watching the kingdom collapse around him — was given a vision of a different kind of covenant:

Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke... But this is the covenant which I will make... I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people... for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.
— Jeremiah 31:31–34

Ezekiel, his contemporary in exile, was given the complementary vision: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes* (Ezek 36:26–27). The two prophets describe the same coming covenant from two angles: Jeremiah from the side of the Law (now written on the heart, not stone), Ezekiel from the side of the Spirit (now indwelling, not external).

The night before His death, Jesus took the cup and said:

This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.
— Luke 22:20 (cf. Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; 1 Cor 11:25)

The Mosaic covenant had been ratified with the blood of bulls (Ex 24:8). The New is ratified with the blood of Christ Himself. Hebrews 8 quotes Jeremiah 31 in full and then says: *when He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete*. Hebrews 9 explains that the death of the testator was necessary for the testament to take effect. Hebrews 10:19–22 calls those who have come to Christ to *draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith* — the way into the Holy of Holies has been opened.

THE COVENANT UNDER WHICH WE NOW LIVE

Of the five major covenants, only the Noahic and the New are currently in force as covenants between God and man. The Abrahamic is fulfilled in Christ for those who are of faith; the Mosaic is obsolete; the Davidic is fulfilled in the reign of Christ. The New Covenant is the covenant the gospel announces — *repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38) — and the covenant the church lives under until the Lord returns.

Notes on the framework — edge cases, debated covenants, and what Scripture names

This study treats the five covenants Scripture itself most explicitly names: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New. Other texts use covenant language in ways worth noting briefly.

The Edenic / Adamic question

Scripture does not use the word *covenant* for God's relationship with Adam in Genesis 1–3. Hosea 6:7 says *they like Adam have transgressed the covenant* — though some translations read *they like men*; the Hebrew is ambiguous. Some teachers reasonably argue that the elements of a covenant (parties, promise, prohibition, consequence) are all present in Eden, even if the word is not. Others hold that respect for the text's own vocabulary calls for not calling it a covenant. This study takes the latter view, while acknowledging the question.

The Palestinian or Land Covenant

Deuteronomy 30 promises Israel that if they return to the Lord with all their heart, He will restore them to the land — even after exile. Some teachers count this as a distinct covenant; others treat it as an expansion of the Mosaic. The substance is real either way: God's commitment to restore Israel to the land was honored at the return from Babylon and remains a theological touchstone.

The priestly covenant with Phinehas

After Phinehas's zeal at Peor, the Lord granted him *My covenant of peace... the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God* (Num 25:12–13; cf. Mal 2:4–5). This is a covenant within the Mosaic framework, regulating the priesthood. Hebrews argues that Christ's priesthood — after the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron — supersedes this priestly arrangement (Heb 7).

A “covenant” with creation

Jeremiah 33:20–21 speaks of God's *covenant for the day* and *My covenant for the night, that day and night will not be at their appointed time*; and Hosea 2:18 speaks of a covenant with the beasts of the field. These are evocative uses of covenant language to underline God's ordering of creation, not separate covenants with man.

How the covenants relate to one another

Later covenants do not cancel earlier ones unless explicitly stated. The Noahic still stands (the earth still has rainbows). The Abrahamic still stands (the gospel goes to all nations). The Davidic still stands (Christ reigns). Only the Mosaic was declared obsolete in Hebrews 8:13 — and even there, what was obsolete was the specific arrangement of priesthood, sacrifice, and ceremonial law that had picture-purpose; the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments is reaffirmed in the New Testament (Rom 13:8–10; Eph 6:2–3).

Companion spokes

The **Lamb God Provides** traces the same redemption arc through the lamb imagery from Abel to Revelation. The **Tabernacle** spoke shows the Mosaic covenant's ceremonial structure as a shadow of Christ's priesthood. The **Kinsman-Redeemer** spoke shows the kinsman pattern fulfilled in Christ. All four spokes converge on the same fulfillment in different keys.

Primary Source: The Holy Bible — Genesis 9, 12, 15, 17, 22; Exodus 19–24; 2 Samuel 7; Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36; Hebrews 6–10; Galatians 3–4

A deep-dive companion to the Noble Mind Study Old Testament Timeline · [The Lamb God Provides](#) · [The Tabernacle](#) · [The Kinsman-Redeemer](#) ·

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