

## The Five Jewish Covenants

By Bob Warren

Israel received five covenants throughout their history, one conditional and four unconditional covenants:

1. The conditional Covenant of Law, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)
2. The unconditional Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18; 26:2-5; 28:13-15)
3. The unconditional Palestinian Covenant (The Land Covenant) (Deuteronomy 30:1-10)
4. The unconditional Davidic Covenant (2Samuel 7:16; 1Chronicles 17:10-14)
5. The unconditional New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

A great disparity exists between a conditional and unconditional covenant. The fulfillment of a conditional covenant is dependent upon the individuals receiving the covenant, not the initiator of the covenant. Specific conditions must be fulfilled by the recipients before the one offering the covenant is obligated to fulfill what is promised. The Mosaic covenant (the Law) was a conditional covenant.

In the case of an unconditional covenant, the one initiating the covenant is responsible to fulfill the conditions prescribed in the covenant regardless of the recipients' response. No "if" is attached, in other words. The promises included in the covenant are guaranteed through the authority and integrity of the one initiating the covenant, apart from the worthiness of the recipients. However, attached blessings, which spring forth from the original covenant, are conditioned upon the response of the recipients. These conditioned blessings, nevertheless, do not make the original covenant conditional. It remains unconditional.

For instance, the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12:1-3 is unconditional. God promised to fulfill this covenant regardless of Abraham's response. Yet, Abraham could have forfeited many of the conditioned blessings associated with the covenant had he walked in blatant disobedience. For instance, God promised to bless those who blessed Abraham and curse those who cursed him (Genesis 12:3). The number of people who cursed Abraham could have multiplied exponentially (thus complicating his life) had he failed to display God's compassion, love, and sensitivity toward his acquaintances. We too can reap consequences in this life from the sins we commit as believers (Colossians 3:25), even though Christ's blood, the blood of the New Covenant (an unconditional covenant), allowed God to forgive our past, present, and future sins.

We must be careful to properly interpret the five above-mentioned covenants lest we misinterpret God's dealings with physical Israel. Let's take each of these covenants and interpret them based on the full counsel of His Word.

### *The Conditional Covenant of Law, the Ten Commandments*

*(Exodus 20:1-17)*

God gave physical Israel the Law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). Being a conditional covenant, blessings followed obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14), but curses followed disobedience (Deuteronomy

28:15-68). The Law was given to the Jews so they might: (1) Repent of their sin and accept the “seed” of Genesis 3:15 as Savior (2) Take the good news of the coming Messiah (the “seed” of Genesis 3:15 and the “Prophet” of Deuteronomy 18:18) to the Gentiles. Hence, Israel was called as “*a kingdom of priests*” according to Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 61:6, the priests being the nation’s teachers. She was to teach the truth entrusted to her to the Gentiles. Instead, she viewed the Gentiles as unworthy, hoarding the truth to herself. This mindset will be nonexistent during the Millennium (the one thousand year reign of Christ on earth—which follows the great Tribulation). Israel, finally fulfilling her original calling as “*a kingdom of priests*” (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 61:6), will be delighted to share the good news of the gospel with the Gentile “*nations*.” The 144,000 Jewish evangelists of Revelation 7:1-8 will take the gospel to the Gentiles during the Tribulation, but Israel will fulfill her calling to even a greater degree during the Millennium.

Only the lost live under Law (1Timothy 1:9), for New Testament believers are delivered from the Law to live “*under grace*” (Romans 6:14) once they repent and believe while depraved—proving that the Law is given to convict the lost (spiritually unregenerated) of sin (Galatians 3:24). The Law is an impossible standard (Romans 3:20; 5:20), a truth understood well by God even while issuing the Ten Commandments. In fact, the Law was given “*...that the transgression might increase...*” (Romans 5:20) so the unredeemed (spiritually unregenerated) might see their need for a Savior. Jesus was “born under the Law” (Galatians 4:4), and lived under the Law flawlessly (2Corinthians 5:21) during His First Coming. Therefore, when He takes up residence in a New Testament believer (Galatians 2:20), the Father sees that individual as having lived the Law perfectly. As a result, Paul wrote that God made us the “*righteousness*” of Himself once we repented and believed while depraved (2Corinthians 5:21). What amazing news! (A review of the truth regarding the Law in the *Romans 1-8* study might be helpful at this time.)

### *The Unconditional Abrahamic Covenant*

*(Genesis 12:1-7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18; 26:2-5; 28:13-15)*

This covenant, being unconditional, guaranteed Abraham that through him “*all the families of the earth will be blessed*” (Genesis 12:1-3):

*Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country,  
And from your relatives  
And from your father’s house,  
To the land which I will show you;  
2 And I will make you a great nation,  
And I will bless you,  
And make your name great;  
And so you shall be a blessing;  
3 And I will bless those who bless you,  
And the one who curses you I will curse.  
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”* (Genesis 12:1-3)

This guarantee could be issued only because of the Messiah, the “seed” of Genesis 3:15, born through Abraham’s lineage. Yes, Jesus would be a Jew, a descendant of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. God would also bless those who blessed Abraham but curse those who cursed him (Genesis 12:1-3). In other words, God would bless the individuals (and nations) who blessed the Jews (Abraham’s physical descendants through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob) but curse the individuals (and nations) who cursed

the Jews—a truth that explains much of history. Abraham’s offspring would be “*as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore*” (Genesis 22:15-18).

God also promised Abraham (along with Abraham’s physical descendants through Isaac and Jacob—the Jews, physical Israel) the real estate “*from the river of Egypt...to the river Euphrates*” (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-8), a land Abraham and the Jews have yet to occupy and control in its entirety. This full occupation (and control) will finally come to fruition during the one-thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth—the Millennium.

Some theologians argue that God fulfilled the promises regarding the land through Joshua. Passages such as Joshua 21:43-45 and 23:14 are cited in an attempt to validate their position:

*So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. 44 And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. 45 Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.* (Joshua 21:43-45)

*Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed.* (Joshua 23:14)

The “*promises*” and “*good words*” of God which “*came to pass*” (Joshua 21:45; 23:14) could not point to the ultimate fulfillment of all the promises regarding the land, for the unconditional Palestinian Covenant (studied next) guaranteed that a day would come when every Jew living in the land would walk in unwavering obedience to Jehovah (Deuteronomy 30:6). Such was not the case in Joshua’s day. Therefore, because all the land promises were not fulfilled in Joshua’s day, the “*promises*” and “*good words*” mentioned in Joshua 21:45 and 23:14 relate to what God had stated concerning their enemies—“*and no one of all their enemies stood before them*” (Joshua 21:44). Yes, none of their enemies stood before them, yet many enemies remained:

*“For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, I know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.* (Joshua 23:12-13)

According to Judges 1:1-36, Israel was unsuccessful in driving out the pockets of enemies that remained in the land after Joshua’s death (enemies that were not driven out while Joshua was alive)—again confirming that the land promises were not fulfilled in their entirety through Joshua or the Judges. Only during the Millennium (and subsequent to Jesus’ Second Coming) will the land promises be fulfilled as specified by Scripture.

The blessings promised to Abraham, which come to full fruition through the Messiah, Jesus Christ, were passed down through Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5), Abraham’s son through Sarah (Genesis 21:1-7)—not through Ishmael, Abraham’s son through Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16; 21:8-21). The blessings of Abraham (associated with the coming Messiah) were also passed down through Jacob, Isaac’s son through Rebekah—not Esau, Jacob’s twin brother (Genesis 28:1-15). Note that none of these passages teach that God detested or despised either Ishmael or Esau. In fact, God greatly blessed Ishmael according to

Genesis 17:20. God chose Isaac (over Ishmael) and Jacob (over Esau) for the purpose of bringing the “seed” of Genesis 3:15, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16), into the world. Thus, God chose to bless the world through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a choice that in no way affected the eternal destiny of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, or Esau. In each case, their eternal abode was based on whether they accepted or rejected the “seed” of Genesis 3:15, Who is Christ (Galatians 3:16). This truth is foundational for the proper interpretation of Romans 9-11.

The Abrahamic Covenant will reach its ultimate fulfillment at Jesus’ Second Coming—which ushers in the Messianic Kingdom, His one-thousand-year reign on the earth. Abraham, along with the Jews who have chosen to believe on the “seed” of Genesis 3:15 (Jesus the Messiah—Galatians 3:16), will finally occupy (and control) the real estate originally promised in Genesis 15:18— “*from the river of Egypt...to the river Euphrates*” (Genesis 15:18). At the same time, Abraham’s many children from among the Gentiles (Galatians 3:29) will join him (a subject addressed in more depth shortly)—fulfilling God’s original promise that Abraham would be “*the father of a multitude of nations*” (Genesis 17:4-5). Therefore, every condition prescribed in the Abrahamic Covenant continues to be fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

An allegory is a symbolic representation of the literal. Thus, those individuals who interpret Scripture allegorically view the “hidden” meaning of a passage (or passages) as more significant than the content of the literal text—leaving the final authority with man rather than the Scriptures. The amount of allegorization required for one to view the church, which began in Acts 2, as fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant is incomprehensible. Why would Ezekiel spend the last nine chapters of his prophetic masterpiece describing (in detail) the Messianic Kingdom, established subsequent to Jesus’ Second Coming, should the church be fulfilling it now (allegorically) rather than the Jews (in a literal sense) later? By the way, those who perceive the church as fulfilling (allegorically) God’s four unconditional covenants granted to physical Israel do not believe in a one-thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. Yet, the Old Testament writing prophets invested significant time making certain that the Second Coming of Christ and the Messianic Kingdom, established subsequent to His return, were described as vividly as possible (Isaiah 60-66 and Ezekiel 40-48 are only two examples). The New Testament is also vocal regarding this one-thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth (read Revelation 20 for starters).

### *The Unconditional Palestinian Covenant*

*(Deuteronomy 30:1-10)*

God promised to one day bring the Jews (physical Israel), Abraham’s physical offspring through Isaac and Jacob, back into the Promised Land in a state of belief—that is, every Jew living on the earth at Jesus’ Second Coming (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). This event will occur at the end of the Tribulation, after the Antichrist has attempted to exterminate the physical Jewish nation. Seeing their hopeless state, the Jews will finally accept Jesus as Messiah (Isaiah 53:1-12) and call Him back (Hosea 5:15); then His return will usher in the Messianic Kingdom—His one-thousand-year reign on the earth. Thus, through Jesus’ return the conditions prescribed in the Palestinian Covenant will be fulfilled—as is the case with the Abrahamic Covenant. At this time the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 will also reach its ultimate fulfillment. The New Covenant will be discussed more thoroughly, shortly.

Teaching that the church is fulfilling the Palestinian Covenant requires the Scriptures to be allegorized mercilessly.

### *The Unconditional Davidic Covenant*

*(2Samuel 7:16; 1Chronicles 17:10-14)*

The Davidic Covenant of 2Samuel 7:16 and 1Chronicles 17:10-14 guaranteed David an eternal “*throne*,” an eternal “*house*” (dynasty), an eternal “*kingdom*,” as well as an eternal descendant (seed) Who would sit on his throne. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant in that He, being the eternal offspring “*of David*” (Matthew 21:9), will sit eternally on David’s “*throne*,” establish an eternal dynasty, and rule over an eternal “*kingdom*” during His one-thousand-year reign on the earth (subsequent to His Second Coming). Hence, the Davidic “*throne will...be established in lovingkindness, and a judge will sit on*” this throne and reign “*in faithfulness,...seek justice*,” and judge “*righteously*” (Isaiah 16:5; 9:6-7). After all, Jesus will reign for the wellbeing of others, not Himself. His *throne* will be situated in *Jerusalem* (Psalm 48:1-3, 8; Isaiah 33:20-24; 52:7-10; 60:14; Jeremiah 33:16; Ezekiel 48:35; Zechariah 8:22-23; 14:16-17—only a partial listing of references is included). According to Revelation 20:4, we will reign with Christ.

Again we discover the degree to which the Scriptures must be allegorized for the church to be the ultimate (and final) fulfillment of this covenant. Should the church function in this manner, God has lied to the Jews (physical Israel).

#### *The Unconditional New Covenant*

*(Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

The New Covenant is found in Jeremiah 31:31-34, where God promises a day when every Jew living on the earth will repent, believe, and be saved. This fact is confirmed by Romans 11:26, a verse we will cover in much greater depth later in the study:

*and thus all Israel will be saved;... (Romans 11:26)*

Every Jew who has graced the earth has not died a child of the kingdom (as evidenced by both the Old and New Testaments). Many Jews have died void of repenting and believing in Jesus as Messiah; yet one day God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will write His Law on the hearts of all Jews living on the earth at that time—each of which will have repented and believed while depraved. This event will occur at the end of the Tribulation when the Jews (physical Israel), facing annihilation at the hands of the Antichrist, will accept Jesus (Isaiah 53:1-12) and call Him back (Hosea 5:15). At His return (His Second Coming), Jesus will annihilate the Antichrist and His armies and establish the Messianic Kingdom, His one-thousand-year reign on the earth.

Both Jews and Gentiles partake of the New Covenant today (during the church age) when God places them in Christ subsequent to their repenting and believing. However, the New Covenant will not be fulfilled in its entirety until every Jew living on the earth at the end of the Tribulation chooses to accept Jesus as Messiah.

Through allegorizing the Scriptures, some theologians teach that the church fulfills the New Covenant and, therefore, God is finished with physical Israel. Yet, the Scriptures emphatically specify that the New Covenant will reach its ultimate fulfillment through the Jews (all the Jews living on the earth at the end of the Tribulation) accepting Christ as Messiah. This glorious event will occur sometime after the church has been taken (raptured) to heaven.