

# Covenants of Israel

## Introduction

God began His plan to establish the nation of Israel with the call of Abraham and the making of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Abrahamic covenant is the foundation for all subsequent covenants that God made with Israel. God's goal in making the covenants was for Israel to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19.5-6). While the nation has failed to achieve this goal it will be achieved in a future day for God is sovereign and keeps His promises. Everything God promised the nation through the covenants will be fulfilled when the Lord returns to set up His kingdom on earth and rule as "David's greater Son" (Luke 1.31-33, 20.41-44; Matthew 6.10).

God revealed in the Abrahamic Covenant that Gentile blessing would henceforth be mediated through Israel (Isaiah 42.1, 60.1-3; Zechariah 8.22-23). This blessing assumed the obedience of national Israel. Blessings to Israel would ultimately come through the Messiah and blessing to Gentiles through Israel. But how could Gentiles be blessed in the face of Israel's disobedience, i.e., rejection of their Messiah? The answer was that they couldn't. God had no covenantal provision, no plan to bless Gentiles apart from Israel's national obedience.

But God is tricky. Being sovereign and omniscient, He knew Israel would reject the Messiah and had a plan to bless Gentiles in spite of Israel's failure. Instead of moving forward with the prophetic plan of the Day of the Lord, God expressed His love and grace to mankind by the call and conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Through Paul, God created the Church, the body of Christ, not on the basis of covenant (Ephesians 2.11-14) but through Paul, "the apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11.13). God created the body of Christ by grace alone (Ephesians 2.5, 8-9). This new creation, the body

of Christ, was a “[secret](#)” ([μυστήριον](#)) until he ascended, resurrected Lord revealed it to Paul. Ultimately, God’s plans cannot be thwarted, even by the disobedience of man. He blessed Gentiles through the creation of the Church in the face of Israel’s fall (Romans 11.25). Yet a future day remains for national Israel. In that day, Israel will become obedient and fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations (Matthew 23.39; Romans 11.15). God is sovereign!

## The Covenants

God structured His relationship with Israel around covenants. A covenant normally is defined as an agreement or contract between two parties. An examination of the covenants God made with Israel reveals they were decidedly one-sided. Put another way they were sovereign declarations. Even the Mosaic Covenant, which is viewed as conditional, in the final analysis, turns out to be unconditional, i.e., sovereignly established, because its provisions will be fulfilled through the New Covenant. Therefore, the best way to view these covenants is as *promises*.

God made six covenants with Israel. They are the following:

- [Abrahamic Covenant](#)
- [Mosaic Covenant](#)
- [Sabbatic Covenant](#)
- [Palestinian or Land Covenant](#)
- [Davidic Covenant](#)
- [New Covenant](#)

The Scriptures teach these covenants were given to Israel *alone* (cf. Romans 9.1-5, Ephesians 2.11-12). The Scriptures declare national Israel will exist forever and God will never forsake the nation (Isaiah 14.1; 59.20-21; 61.8-9; Jeremiah 31.35-37; Ezekiel 16.59-63; Hosea 2.16-23). God established a relationship with Abraham and that relationship began a new period of time in how God would deal with the human race.

Gentiles would be blessed by being united to Israel (e.g. proselytes) and through abiding by the Abrahamic Covenant (i.e. Genesis 12.3). Examples of such blessing were the Jews in Egypt under Joseph, Nineveh (Jonah), Babylon and Persia (Daniel), etc. God has not structured His relationship with the Church, the body of Christ, through covenants. God's relationship with the Church, His body, is structured on grace. It is a new creation, a secret God revealed to and through the apostle Paul. The finished work of Christ (His death and resurrection) is the basis of God's relationship to the Church. The finished work of Christ also the basis of His relationship with Israel for it was Christ's work that restored man's broken relationship with God through Adam's sin.

As noted, the foundational covenant for Israel's relationship with God was the Abrahamic Covenant. It formed the groundwork for the promises that would be revealed in the other covenants. The below chart outlines the covenants. Notice that the Mosaic Covenant is replaced by the New Covenant and that all the covenants will be fulfilled when Jesus reigns as King in the Messianic Kingdom (Jeremiah 23.5; Zechariah 14.9).

<td↑ Sabbatic Covenant Israel is ruled by the Messiah, Who provides blessings to the nations.

<b>Jesus the Messiah-King Fulfills Israel's Covenants During the Messianic Kingdom</b>			
<b>New Covenant (Spiritual Empowerment)</b>		<b>Davidic Covenant (Kingship)</b>	<b>Land Covenant (Kingdom)</b>
↑ Mosaic Covenant	↑ Sabbatic Covenant	Israel is ruled by the Messiah, Who provides blessings to the nations.	
<b>Abrahamic Covenant</b> "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12.3).			

Abrahamic Covenant

God established the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12.1-3 and confirmed it in Genesis 13.14-17; 15.1-21; 17.1-27; 22.17-18; 26.1-5; 28.10-17; 32.12; 48.3-4; 50.24. It was reiterated many times throughout the Old Testament (cf. Exodus 2.23-25; 3.6-8, 17; 6.4; 12.25; 13.5, 11; Judges 2.1; 1 Chronicles 16.13-18; 2 Chronicles 20.7; Psalm 105.6-11; Jeremiah 24.6; 31.35-37; 32.40-41; Amos 9.15; Isaiah 60.21). This covenant was a *sovereign* promise God made with Abraham. Its validity and fulfillment depend wholly upon God's sovereign faithfulness.

The elements of the Covenant were that God would make Abraham great, that he and his seed would be a blessing to all mankind, that God would bless those who blessed them and curse him that cursed him, that Abraham would have innumerable offspring (physical and spiritual), and that God would give Abraham and his offspring land—"from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." Below are specific provisions of the Covenant:

Abrahamic Covenant Promises and Provisions Based Upon the Character and Sovereignty of God	Scripture
God will make Abraham a great nation	Genesis 12.2
God will bless Abraham	Genesis 12.2; 22.17
God will make Abraham's name great	Genesis 12.2
God will make Abraham a blessing to the whole world	Genesis 12.2, 3; 22.18
God will bless those who bless Abraham and his descendants <sup>1</sup>	Genesis 12.3
God will curse the one who curses Abraham and his descendants	Genesis 12.3
Eternal land grant from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates	Genesis 12.6-7; 13.14-15, 15.7, 17.7-8

God will give Abraham innumerable descendants	Genesis 15.5; 13.16; 17.2; 22.17
God will make Abraham a father of many nations	Genesis 17.4-6
God will establish this covenant forever	Genesis 17.7
Circumcision was the sign of the covenant	Genesis 17.10-14
Established through the line of Isaac/Jacob, not Ishmael	Genesis 17.19-21; cf. Romans 9.7
Abraham's seed will overcome its enemies	Genesis 22.17

When God told Abram that he would give (נתת) him the land (v. 7) Abram asked God how he could know this for certain. This Hebrew verb is the one used in Genesis 12, 17, etc. for God's "making" the covenant with Abraham. The word means "give", "grant", "bestow." In Genesis 15.18, we have a different Hebrew word for God's "making a covenant" with Abraham and is used for the ratification of the covenant. This Hebrew word is to "cut" קטע a covenant. We have remnants of this idea even today. The military still uses the expression to "cut orders." In the ancient Near East during the time of Abraham covenants were confirmed by each party of an agreement passing between pieces of animals cut apart. In the Biblical account, Abram brought God animals and cut them in two. Highly significant in the ratification of the covenant, the deeding of the land, is the fact that God alone passed through the pieces. He did not permit Abram to participate in the ceremony. God put Abraham to sleep and performed alone the ceremony of passing between the pieces of the animals. This action God demonstrated God was the sovereign and responsible party to fulfill the covenant, specifically, that Abraham and his offspring through Isaac/Jacob would have the designated land forever. Despite the failure of Abram's descendants, God would not fail. He will keep His promise.

God told Abram that his descendants would be slaves in Egypt for 400 years but that they would return to the land that he had given to Abram (Genesis 15.13-14)—a land which extended from the river of Egypt (הַיַּרְדֵּן הַיְשָׁנָה) to the Euphrates. This was the first time the boundaries were given for the title-deed (v. [reftagger title="Genesis 15.18"]18[/reftagger], cf. Exodus 23.31) "I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you"). At present, right to the land is in conflict. Most Arabs refuse to recognize Israel's right to the land or even to exist in the Middle East. God is not concerned with what man thinks about such matters. God promised that in a future day He will fulfill His covenant with Abraham and establish Israel's borders from Egypt to the Euphrates River. The new boundaries will be much more extensive than Israel's current borders and may include the lands from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, western Iraq, and northern Saudi Arabia. If the entire river is meant for the northeastern boundary, then Israel's land will extend across most of the Mideast unto ancient Babylon.

In the Genesis 17 passage, we read that God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah and the sign of the covenant, circumcision, was established. God gave this sign as a reminder of His promise. In verse 7, God stated that he would "establish" this covenant and the Hebrew word is **קָם** rather than **קָמַם** or **קָמַמָה**. This word means "stand". The modern sense of meaning is that this covenant will, idiomatically, "have legs." God meant "it will happen" for he will *make* it happen. God stated explicitly that the land He promised Abraham and his descendants was an *everlasting* possession (v. 8). God also stated the line of promise went through *Isaac* (v. 21), not Ishmael. While some Arab peoples are descended from Abraham through Ishmael—Ishmael had twelve sons (Genesis 17.20)—they were not in the line of promise, i.e., the line of Isaac and Jacob. Therefore, the Arab peoples

have no *Scriptural* claim to the land promised to Abraham and his seed.

The Abrahamic Covenant was, therefore, *sovereignly established* and *eternal*. God did all the promising. Throughout the passages above, i.e., Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17, 22 God repeatedly declared, "I will". God promised that he would sovereignly accomplish the provisions of His covenant. Since God has stated it was an everlasting covenant, it is impossible, unless God's sovereignty is abrogated, for it to be nullified or fail. Some maintain the Abrahamic Covenant was conditional. Such a conclusion can be reached only by denying God is sovereign.

### Mosaic Covenant

God's purpose for Israel was that they should be a holy nation composed of a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19.4-6). With the call of Abraham, Israel became "special" in God's sight and in His dealings (cf. Deuteronomy 7.6, 14.2, 26.19, 28.9; 1 Peter 2.5, 9; Revelation 1.6, 5.10; 20.6). Israel promised to do all the Mosaic Law (Exodus 19.8) but has failed. Despite their historic failure, the nation will one day keep the Law and God will fulfill His purpose for them: a nation of priests.

Unlike other covenants God gave to Israel, which were sovereignly established and eternal, the Mosaic Covenant was *temporal* and *conditional*. It required obedience. God knew Israel would not, indeed, could not keep it—even though the people promised they would (Exodus 19.8). In anticipation, God promised Israel a New Covenant to replace the Mosaic Covenant. Jesus inaugurated this New Covenant (Matthew 26.28), but its fulfillment remains future (see below).

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the Law was given. The Law's purpose was not to save but to reveal and condemn sin (cf. Romans 3.20; 1 Timothy 1.8-11). Most people think of the Mosaic Law as the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments

(Exodus 20.1-17). This is known as the moral law. Beyond this were civil and ceremonial laws which governed Israel's daily life, priestly activities, and rules regarding behavior when sin occurred. Under the Mosaic Law, mercy and a temporary cleansing from sin existed through the Levitical sacrifices. The animal sacrifices provided a means whereby sin was temporarily "atoned for by offering a substitute" (כִּפָּוּר). Most of the usages of the word involve the priest "making an atonement" for the individual. For example, in Leviticus alone, there are 49 instances of this usage with no other meaning. The verb (always in the Piel stem, i.e., intensive action) is always used in connection with the removal of sin or defilement, except for Genesis 32.20; Proverbs 16.14; Isaiah 28.18 where the related meaning of "appease by a gift" is used. In other words, the life of the sacrificial animal symbolized by its blood was required in exchange for the life of the individual. It was a symbol of innocent life given or sacrificed for guilty life. Such symbolism was emphasized by the worshiper placing his hands upon the head of the animal, confessing his sin, and killing the animal (Leviticus 1.3-9). These sacrifices were extensive and covered priests, rulers, the congregation in sins of ignorance (Leviticus 4). On the Day of Atonement, the priest chose two goats. One was offered as a sacrifice and the other was taken into the wilderness. This "scapegoat" (Leviticus 16), i.e., the "escape goat" symbolized the removal of sin from the congregation. These sacrifices were temporary measures and prefigured Christ's sacrifice which truly and permanently atoned for sin.

No Jew understood this until *after* Jesus was crucified and resurrected, cf. Luke 18.34. More precisely, no Jew understood the significance of the sacrifices and the death/resurrection of Christ until *Paul* revealed its meaning. Luke's record of Pentecost in Acts 2 reveals Peter had no understanding of the significance of Christ's death and resurrection other than the fact that He was alive and could establish Israel's earthly kingdom. In the future, Israel will enjoy the New Covenant

whereby the Law, instead of being written on tablets of stone, will be “written on the heart” (Jeremiah 31.33; Ezekiel 36.22-32). Much remains uncertain regarding life in the Messianic Kingdom, but Israel, under the New Covenant, will offer animal sacrifices (Ezekiel 45.15-25; cf. 43.18-27; 46.4-24).

The significance of these sacrifices has been debated. Hebrews teaches Christ’s death satisfied the justice of God and His sacrifice paid for man’s sin once for all (Hebrews 9.26, 10.10). But Ezekiel wrote animal sacrifices continue to “cover” (כִּסְוָה) Israel (Ezekiel 45.15, 17, 20) in the Millennial kingdom. Noteworthy is the fact that under the Old Covenant animal sacrifices only “covered” sin. They could never satisfy the justice of God. The animal sacrifices under the Old Covenant also served as indicators of faith. This may be their primary role under the New Covenant in the kingdom to keep the Law and be a nation of priests (Deuteronomy 30.8-16; Exodus 19.4-6).

Historically, since Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), the Mosaic Law has been divided into three main categories—*leges morales, ceremoniales, and judiciales*—the moral law (usually the Decalogue, Exodus 20.1-26), the civil law, and the ceremonial law (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy). But the Jews never divided the Law in this way. For them, it was a unified whole. Aquinas most likely made these divisions to help to categorize and understand the Law due to its length and complexity.

When Moses presented Israel with the requirements of the Covenant the people agreed to keep them. Exodus 19.8 reads, “The people all responded together, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said.’” While the nation agreed to keep the covenant, it failed. Therefore, God promised another covenant, the New Covenant, for Israel. Under this covenant, Israel *will* succeed in becoming a holy nation of priests (Exodus 19.6) and the Law, previously written on tablets of stone will be written on their hearts (Jeremiah 31.33).

The following scriptures explain the purpose of the Law and how it has been superseded by Christ. Paul's epistles and the epistle to the Hebrews explain this clearly and fully. From them we learn the following:

1. The Mosaic Law was not for Gentiles (cf. Romans 2.14-15, 9.3-5; 1 Corinthians 9.20-21).
2. The Mosaic Law's purpose was to reveal sin, not to justify (cf. Romans 3.19-20, 7.7; Galatians 3.19-22; 1 Timothy 1.8-11; Hebrews 7.11-19).
3. The Mosaic Law is not for the Church, the body of Christ, i.e., Christians are not under the authority of the Mosaic Law (cf. Romans 6.14-15, 7.1-6, 10.4; Galatians 3.23-26, 4.21-31, 5.1-4, 18, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Christians are under grace, not Law (Romans 6.14; Galatians 5.18) and called to liberty (Galatians 5.1, 13). Love is to be operative motivation for the believer (Galatians 5.13-14) and the believer is to conduct his life under the control of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8.4; Galatians 5.16). These elements combined to form what Paul called the "law of Christ" (Galatians 6.2) and the "law of God" (Romans 7.22, 25, 8.7)

## Sabbatic Covenant

God established the Sabbatic Covenant with Israel (Exodus 31.12-18 cf. Leviticus 24.8, 25.1-55 (land sabbath); Ezekiel 44.24, 45.17, 46.1, 3-4, 12). The Sabbatic covenant has the following provisions:

1. A sign between God and the nation Israel (v. 13)
2. Eternal in length (v. 13, 16-17)
3. Purpose is for Israel to know that it is the LORD who sanctifies them (v. 13)
4. Israel is to observe the sabbath for it is holy to them (v. 14-15)

The Sabbath was only for the nation of Israel. Neither

Gentiles nor the Church have any part of it. The covenant is eternal (cf. Ezekiel 44.24, 45.17, 46.1, 3-4, 12) and sovereignly established. God set forth no conditions with regard to its validity and it cannot be broken because it depends on God's sovereignty. Since it is only for Israel and is eternal it is yet another proof that the nation of Israel will exist forever. God explicitly declared that the nation of Israel would last forever to Jeremiah,

*<sup>35</sup> Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: <sup>36</sup> "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever." <sup>37</sup> Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31.35-37).*

Some teach God has ended His dealings with national Israel and that the Church has replaced Israel. Such teaching rejects God's veracity and trustworthiness and impugns His sovereignty. The root of such teaching is unbelief.

### The Palestinian or Land Covenant



Royal Land Grant to Abraham  
(Clarence Larkin)

The Palestinian<sup>3</sup> or Land covenant (Deuteronomy 9.1-29, 10.11, 11.8-12, 22-25, 29-31, 12.1, 10-12, 20, 29, 30.1-10) amplified the land aspect of the Abrahamic covenant and was sovereignly established and eternal. God promised to the nation of Israel the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates river (Genesis 15.18). God had made this promise to Abraham. According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, the "river of Egypt" is the Nile or its eastern branch (see [River of Egypt](#) and Exodus 23.31). So, the land that God has promised Israel stretches from the vicinity of the Nile to the Euphrates (see map).

Moses spoke prophetically of Israel's disobedience and dispersion throughout the world. The nation was disobedient throughout its relationship with God and God disciplined it. For example, the nation broke the Law by refusing to keep the land sabbaths (Exodus 23.10-11; Leviticus 25.2-7, 18-22). God judged Israel for this lapse by bringing in the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. The nation had disregarded the land sabbaths for 490 years. God declared that he would have His sabbaths and brought the nation into captivity for 70 years (2 Chronicles 36.16-21; Jeremiah 25.9-12, 26.6-7, 29.10). Moses prophesied this would happen (Leviticus 26.32-35; cf. Jeremiah 25.11-13; Daniel 9.2-20; Nehemiah 1.8). During this time, the land lay fallow and was desolate (Nehemiah 1.3, 2.13-17). Both the Bible and history record that when Israel is out of the land, it becomes desolate. After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the desolation was recorded by Dio Cassius.<sup>4</sup> Many observations have been made throughout history that confirm that when the Jews are outside of their land it was desolate.<sup>5</sup>

Israel's greatest disobedience was the rejection of its Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus presented himself officially to the nation as the Messiah (cf. Matthew 21.1-9; Mark 11.1-10; Luke 19.28-44; John 12.12-19). While some Jews

believed in him as the Messiah, the leaders of Israel rejected His Messiahship and conspired with the Roman authorities to have him crucified. After Jesus' resurrection, national Israel was given other opportunities to repent and accept their Messiah and His kingdom (Acts 2-3; Acts 13; 18; 28). Indeed, this is the theme of the book of Acts. The purpose of Acts is to give us an understanding of the temporary fall of Israel in God's plan. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. marked the end of national Israel (until 1948 when it was again re-established) and its destruction was judgment for rejection of the Messiah. Jesus had foretold this destruction (cf. Matthew 24.1-2).

In the Palestinian or Land covenant, God promised that Israel would return to him and that he would restore them to the land. Once there, they would become more prosperous than they had ever been before (Deuteronomy 30.1-5). Second, God promised to regenerate the Israelites by circumcising their hearts so that they would love Him. (Deuteronomy 30.6). This will be fulfilled under the New Covenant. Third, God promised to judge Israel's enemies (Deuteronomy 30.7). Lastly, Israel will obey God and God will prosper them in their obedience (Deuteronomy 30.8-9). Numerous passages indicate that God will bring Israel back into the land where they will be faithful to Him (Jeremiah 32.37-41).

### Davidic Covenant

In the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7.4-29 cf. 23.5; 2 Chronicles 21.7; Psalm 89.3-4; 19-37; Isaiah 9.6-7; Jeremiah 33.19-26; Luke 1.31-33), God promised to establish the throne of David forever. It too was a sovereignly established covenant and amplified the "seed" aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant. The land of Israel (promised in the Abrahamic covenant) is also mentioned in verse 10 of 2 Samuel 7 in which God promised to "plant" Israel permanently in the land (cf. Jeremiah 24.6; 32.36-41; Amos 9.15).

The Davidic Covenant was intimated in Jacob's blessings of his son before his death. David was not identified but his tribe was. Jacob recognized that rulership came from Judah. The text reads:

<sup>8</sup> *"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down to you.* <sup>9</sup> *"Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? <sup>10</sup> "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. <sup>11</sup> "He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine; he washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes. <sup>12</sup> "His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk (Genesis 49.8-12).*

God promised to preserve David's throne forever. The king of Israel had to be a firstborn from the bloodline of David. There was a problem, however. God had a "blood curse" on Coniah or Jeconiah, one of the kings in David's line because of his wickedness (Jeremiah 22.24-30 cf. 2 Kings 24.5-15). Joseph, Mary's husband, was from this Solomonic line. If Jesus had been the biological offspring of Joseph, he would not have been qualified for kingship since God had cursed this line. How did God solve this problem? David had another son, Nathan. This line ended in Heli (Luke 3.23). Heli had no sons. He had three daughters. One was named Mary. Could daughters have inheritance rights? The answer is not normally. But, Mary was eligible due to a case brought by the daughters of Zelophehad to Moses. In this case, Moses allowed the daughters inheritance rights if there were no sons and the daughter married within her tribe (Numbers 26.33; 27.1-11; 36.2-12; Joshua 17.3-6; 1 Chronicles 7.15). Mary, as it happened, fit

the requirements perfectly. She was a daughter, had no brothers, and married Joseph, a man from the same tribe as she—the tribe of Judah. Joseph legally adopted Jesus, which meant he had the royal right of the firstborn. Mary, because of her uncursed bloodline gave Jesus the legal blood right to the throne. The virgin birth of our Lord was essential to the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant for Jesus himself will fulfill the promise of the covenant as he reigns as king upon the earth (Zechariah 14.9).

## New Covenant

The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31.27-34 cf. Ezekiel 11.16-20; 36.24-38) was a sovereign covenant which guarantees national Israel a converted heart. It replaced the Old or Mosaic Covenant which Israel failed to keep. Instead of the Law being written on tablets of stone (as the Mosaic Law), the Law will be written on the hearts of the people.

When will this covenant be fulfilled? It will be fulfilled when all the sovereignly established covenants will be fulfilled—in the Millennial or Messianic kingdom. Jesus initiated the new covenant in the upper room on the evening prior to His arrest and crucifixion (Matthew 26.28). While Jesus initiated the New Covenant its fulfillment remains unrealized. The generation of Jews to whom Jesus ministered rejected him as Messiah and King and delayed the fulfillment of the covenant. A future generation of Jews will repent and experience its fulfillment. This future generation (Romans 11.26-29) will experience the fulfillment of all the other covenants: Abrahamic, Sabbatic, Palestinian, and Davidic covenants in the Messianic Kingdom.

If the New Covenant is made with Israel, does the Church, i.e., the Body of Christ, have a relationship to it? The answer is, yes. But we must understand the context of the Church's relationship to the New Covenant. The following are references to the New Covenant in the New Testament:<sup>6</sup> Matthew

26.28, Mark 14.24, Luke 22.20, 1 Corinthians 11.25 (cf. 1 Corinthians 10.16-17), 2 Corinthians 3.6, Hebrews 8.8-13, 9.15, 12.24.

The passages in Jeremiah and the passages in the New Testament state the New Covenant was made with national Israel. The term "Israel" *always* refers to national Israel (i.e., Jews). Since the old (Mosaic) covenant was made with Israel alone it makes sense that the new covenant is made with Israel alone. Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians that the covenants were to and for Israel alone (Ephesians 2.11-12). Gentiles had no part of them.

The Scriptures teach the [Church](#) was a "secret" entity. God kept it a secret until He revealed it to and through the apostle Paul. Therefore, the Church (the body of Christ) did not exist during Christ's earthly ministry or prior to the salvation and commissioning of Paul as "apostle to the Gentiles." Jesus stated that his ministry was to Israel, i.e., Jew only (cf. Matthew 10.5; Matthew 15.22-24; cf. Romans 15.8). He came to the nation of Israel to present himself as King and announce the kingdom of God (Matthew 3.1-3; Mark 1.14-15). Had the nation repented and accepted him, the Messianic Kingdom would have been established.<sup>7</sup>

The Church was a new creation which began with the apostle Paul just as Israel was a new creation God revealed through Abraham. Each entity—Israel and the Church—has its own destiny and purpose. Most of Christendom has been taught that God's purpose for national Israel has ended. But this idea not found in the Bible. The Scriptures declare that Israel's purpose continues according to God's sovereign plan. Israel has a past history and a future destiny distinct from the Church (the body of Christ) based upon God's promises from His sovereignly established covenants. Jesus' death and resurrection is the foundation and the basis of blessings for both Israel and the Church. While Israel and the Church are distinct and unique

creations by God, we do well to remember there was a time when neither existed. Jesus' death, His payment for sin, provided for *all* mankind. This includes all who believed in YHVH before Israel or the Church were created. The death of Christ was the watershed event of history. In God's plan, it was the redemptive event towards which all history was working. In military terms, the death and resurrection of Christ was God's strategic victory in His campaign against sin, death, and evil. God is now engaged in tactical warfare to complete His eternal plan. As members of the body of Christ, we have the privilege to engage in this warfare (Ephesians 6.10-18).

In this age, God is taking out a people for himself as the body of Christ (the Church). After this work is complete, God will remove it from the earth and will pour out His long-delayed wrath upon a rebellious, Christ-rejecting earth. He will save a repentant Israel and initiate the long-awaited kingdom which Jesus proclaimed to Israel but was rejected by His generation (Romans 15.8). When God ushers in His Kingdom, it will be to a repentant Israeli nation which has accepted Jesus as Messiah. The death and resurrection of Christ form the basis of blessings for the Church as well as the covenantal blessings promised to Israel. In Ephesians 2.11-22, Paul stated that Gentiles were separated from the covenants God made with Israel. Christ's death ended the conditional covenant, the Mosaic Law. Sin, which separated man from God, typified by the veil in the Holy of Holies, was removed.

At the present time, the Church enjoys the *spiritual* blessings of the New Covenant based on Christ's victory over sin and death. Paul related the New Covenant to the Church in these words to the Corinthians,

*<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in*

*remembrance of Me.”<sup>25</sup> In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11.23-26).*

We notice a couple of things in these verses. One is that Paul had a direct revelation from Jesus regarding the events of the last supper. Paul said, “I received from the Lord...” Notice that Paul did not receive this information from Peter or the other apostles. He received it from the resurrected and ascended Christ. The other thing to note is that through Paul we have additional information about the Lord’s Supper to what Jesus spoke: a memorial to the Lord’s death and a proclamation of His return.

What else do we learn from Paul regarding the New Covenant as it relates to the Church? In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul related the spiritual blessing of the New Covenant to these believers. He said,

*<sup>5</sup> Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, <sup>6</sup> who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3.5-6).*

Paul went on to say that although the old covenant (the Mosaic) was a covenant of condemnation and death it was nevertheless glorious. The New Covenant is more glorious in that it brings righteousness, life, and liberty. In a future day, national Israel will enjoy both spiritual and physical blessings of the New Covenant in the Messianic Kingdom or Millennium. The spiritual benefits include a new heart on

which the Law is written, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, and full knowledge of the Lord. The physical benefits of the covenants God made with Israel will begin with the repentance of the nation (Matthew 23.39). The land will stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates river (Genesis 15.18). This is much more land than Israel secured under Solomon in the height of its glory. Jerusalem will be the capital city of the world (Deuteronomy 28.13) and Jesus will reign as King as David's greater Son (Zechariah 14.9). Therefore, while the New Covenant was made with Israel, the Church (the Body of Christ) enjoys its spiritual aspects due to the death and resurrection of Christ.

<sup>1</sup> While Abraham is the father of both Jews and Arabs, the heirs of the covenant are Jews. God stated this in Genesis 17.20-21: "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac (father of Jacob, who became Israel), whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year." Ishmael had twelve sons and became the father of many Arab peoples. Note that God made this promise before Isaac had been born.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, in his sermon, "How Christians Should Regard Moses" (August 27, 1525) wrote the following: "First of all to the First Commandment: 'The text testifies to that and constrains us in that it says: 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exodus 20.2).' This is quite true and sufficiently clear," he goes on to say, "that we Gentiles were not led by God out of Egypt, but only the Jewish people, Israel. Therefore, Moses is applying the Ten Commandments exclusively to the people, which have been led by God out of Egypt.'"

<sup>3</sup> This covenant has been traditionally called the "Palestinian Covenant. The Jews never referred to it this way, however. They called the land they occupied Israel or Judea. Since the

covenant applies to Israel and the Jews never called their land "Palestine" it makes little sense to call this covenant the "Palestinian Covenant." More accurate terminology would be to call it the "Land Covenant" or "Restoration Covenant" since in it God promised to return the people to the land and give it to them forever. It expands the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. The name Palestine refers to a region of the eastern Mediterranean coast from the sea to the Jordan valley and from the southern Negev desert to the Galilee lake region in the north. The word itself derives from "Plesheth", a name that appears frequently in the Bible and has come into English as "Philistine". Plesheth, (root פלשת) was a general term meaning rolling or migratory. This referred to the Philistine's invasion and conquest of the coast from the sea. The Philistines were not Arabs nor even Semites. They were most closely related to the Greeks originating from Asia Minor and Greek localities. They did not speak Arabic. They had no connection, ethnic, linguistic or historical with Arabia or Arabs. The Philistines reached the southern coast of Israel in several waves. One group arrived in the pre-patriarchal period and settled south of Beersheba in Gerar where they came into conflict with Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael. Another group, coming from Crete after being repulsed from an attempted invasion of Egypt by Rameses III in 1194 BC, seized the southern coastal area, where they founded five settlements (Gaza, Ascalon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gat). In the Persian and Greek periods, foreign settlers—chiefly from the Mediterranean islands—overran the Philistine districts. From the fifth century BC, following the historian Herodotus, Greeks called the eastern coast of the Mediterranean "the Philistine Syria" using the Greek language form of the name. In AD 135, after putting down the Bar Kochba revolt, the second major Jewish revolt against Rome, the Emperor Hadrian wanted to blot out the name of the Roman "Provincia Judaea" and so renamed it "Provincia Syria Palaestina", the Latin version of the Greek name and the first use of the name as an administrative unit. The name "Provincia Syria Palaestina" was later shortened to

Palaestina, from which the modern, anglicized "Palestine" is derived. See [Origin of the Name Palestine](#).

<sup>4</sup> Dio Cassius, *History of the Romans*, lxix, 12-14.

<sup>5</sup> For example: In 1835, the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine wrote:

*"Outside the gates of Jerusalem we saw indeed no living object, heard no living sound. We found the same void, the same silence, as we should have found before the entombed gates of Pompeii or Herculaneum. ... A complete, eternal silence reigns in the town, in the highways, in the country ... the tomb of a whole people."*

In 1867, Mark Twain wrote in *Innocents Abroad* (chapter 56) the following:

*"Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies. Where Sodom and Gomorrah reared their domes and towers, that solemn sea now floods the plain, in whose bitter waters no living thing exists—over whose waveless surface the blistering air hangs motionless and dead—about whose borders nothing grows but weeds, and scattering tufts of cane, and that treacherous fruit that promises refreshment to parching lips, but turns to ashes at the touch. Nazareth is forlorn; about that ford of Jordan where the hosts of Israel entered the Promised Land with songs of rejoicing, one finds only a squalid camp of fantastic Bedouins of the desert; Jericho the accursed, lies a moldering ruin, to-day, even as Joshua's miracle left it more than three thousand years ago; Bethlehem and Bethany, in their poverty and their humiliation, have nothing about them now to remind one that they once knew the high honor of the Saviour's presence; the hallowed spot where the shepherds watched their flocks by night, and where the angels sang Peace on earth, good will to men, is untenanted by any living creature, and unblessed*

*by any feature that is pleasant to the eye. Renowned Jerusalem itself, the stateliest name in history, has lost all its ancient grandeur, and is become a pauper village; the riches of Solomon are no longer there to compel the admiration of visiting Oriental queens; the wonderful temple which was the pride and the glory of Israel, is gone, and the Ottoman crescent is lifted above the spot where, on that most memorable day in the annals of the world, they reared the Holy Cross. The noted Sea of Galilee, where Roman fleets once rode at anchor and the disciples of the Saviour sailed in their ships, was long ago deserted by the devotees of war and commerce, and its borders are a silent wilderness; Capernaum is a shapeless ruin; Magdala is the home of beggared Arabs; Bethsaida and Chorazin have vanished from the earth, and the "desert places" round about them where thousands of men once listened to the Saviour's voice and ate the miraculous bread, sleep in the hush of a solitude that is inhabited only by birds of prey and skulking foxes. Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land? Palestine is no more of this work-day world. It is sacred to poetry and tradition—it is dream-land."*

<sup>6</sup> The Pauline passages are the only references that do not apply directly to national Israel. The New Testament (New Covenant) technically does not include the Gospels for the New Covenant was not inaugurated until the Last Supper (Matthew 26.28). When Paul mentioned the New Covenant it was to emphasize its spiritual character.

<sup>7</sup> When the Scriptures refer to "Israel", they always refer to racial Jews—the physical offspring of Jacob. Thus, Israel in Scripture is a [technical term](#) for the physical offspring of Jacob, i.e., Israel. No Scriptural basis exists to support a theology that states that the Church is the new Israel or that the Church has supplanted or replaced Israel in God's plan.

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