

Four Covenants:

Edenic, Adamic, Noahic and Abrahamic

Introduction

God had a complete plan for all of time before He spoke His first words of creation. The plan that He put into effect is the single most effective plan that could have ever been because of who He is. At times and to certain people of His choosing, God has revealed a portion of that plan. In a few very special instances, God has revealed His plan by way of a promise. These promises are called covenants and God has chosen to be bound by every promise He has made. Some of the covenants have been laid out in the form of a contract with conditions that men must fulfill before the promise would be in effect. Most have been without condition, promises given completely by His grace, dependent on nothing else. In this paper we will consider four of God's covenants along with their recipients, conditions, fulfillments, and lasting effects.

The Edenic Covenant

From the first word of Genesis we see the great God of all matter, energy and time preparing a place for fellowship with His created beings. We don't see Him toying with creation or doing anything off-hand. He is involved as Father (Gen 1:1), Son (John 1:1-3) and Spirit (Gen 1:2) in preparing places for all living and particularly with a race to be made in a pattern similar to His own perfection, triune creation as a reflection of a triune creator.

This created being would be aware of his physical surroundings and the passage of time so God made incredible wonders in layer upon layer for His being to discover and care for and be fascinated with. This creation would change over time and become more diverse. It would be a universe that the created being could guide and direct and fashion in some respects as time passed.

This created being would know himself and would know that he was a man, so God made many beings that were not man. This helped the man to understand his difference and his special position in creation. He would have personality and could formulate ideas and could have complex relationships. That his relationships would be diverse and complex and changing, God gave the man a companion who was very much like himself, but very much different. As the man and his companion learned more about each other they would together bring more people gradually into their relationship. Love and joy would continually increase as more men joined the conversation and the community. Men have souls to commune together.

Finally, God desired to be personally involved in the daily lives of His created beings so He gave them a spirit that could know and commune with their God at all times. They could share the joy of discovery, of work, of pleasure, of relationships with God every moment. Their lives would be worship every moment of the day through time. I find it very likely that mankind, once he had explored the earth for a million years or so, would likely have moved on to other parts of God's creation; other planets, other stars, other galaxies, for eons.

Once God had finished His incredible works of creation, and before He rested, He took great care to personally fashion man with tender care and to personally see to the beginning of his learning process as he met all of the animals and learned what his duties would be as ruler of God's creation. Then He introduced him to his helpmeet and stepped back to proclaim it all perfect.

The agreement, the covenant that God made with Adam as he placed him at the head of creation, was one of great privilege and correspondingly great responsibility. C.I. Scofield names seven points in the notes of his reference bible¹. (1) To fill the earth with the influence and order of mankind; (2) to subdue the earth to human uses; (3) to have dominion over the animal creation; (4) to eat herbs and fruits; (5) to till and keep the garden; (6) to abstain from eating of the tree of good and evil; (7) that the penalty was death.

This simple covenant was a contract of employment of sorts, and it was conditioned on Adam and his race fulfilling it in all points. Beyond the very broad instructions there was complete liberty. In every activity and idea there was opportunity to commune directly with God on any question or decision. In truth, only one thing was forbidden, and that was to reject the rule and authority of the Master. Only one tree out of all creation was reserved to the Master Himself. Just as Joseph was put in command of every duty and person and thing in the kingdom of Pharaoh, so the first couple was in command of creation. Joseph was only restricted from one action, sitting on the throne of the king, so Adam was restricted from one thing, the knowledge of good and evil reserved for the Master alone. We know that Joseph, as a picture of the last Adam, was obedient to his king and because of that he saved his entire family and all generations after them. The first Adam, however, grasped the forbidden fruit with both hands and sold his birthright for the sake of his immediate appetite.

Breaking that first covenant did not bring any season of enjoyment to Adam. His life changed immediately for the worse and the consequences mounted as the effects set in. The first sin committed, many more sins began to follow in rapid succession. The full effects of his transgression were exposed the following day when God entered into a new and unconditional covenant.

¹ Rev. C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, note 1, page 6 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945)

The Adamic Covenant

Most of God's second covenant with men was a sentence of doom. Even the devil himself was part of this covenant. Satan had adopted Adam and taken over as governor of creation. Adam had embezzled the world and lost it in a crooked craps game with the father of lies. Here God delivers a series of promises. It is not the desire of God that this covenant be laced with judgment and doom. This fact is made plain in that He promises salvation through His own effort as an integral part of the contract.

This covenant is unconditional simply because it must be. If there had been any way in all of time or space that Adam could have repaired his relationship with God and reclaimed his position God would have announced it right here. If there had been great deeds he could do, great victories he could win or great atonement he could make through any amount of effort then that would have been part of this covenant. Looking at the text in Genesis 3:14-19 we see no hint of opportunity. In verse 14 the snake is cursed to crawl on his belly and eat dust. In verse 15 we see the enmity that will carry on indefinitely between the godly and the ungodly. Here are the promises of Messiah and the defeat of Satan at the end. In verse sixteen we have Eve's part of the curse; that she will have many children, too many likely for her and Adam to keep under control. She would have hard labor and pain and perhaps need to fear death at child bearing. She would find weakness in herself and have need for the protection and comfort of her husband, and she would need to approach God and obey His direction under the delegation through her husband.

In verse 17-19 Adam at last hears what his new role in life will be. He will now eat bread, a food that requires much work to prepare. For bread you must glean and hull grain. You must remove chaff and grind it with stones. Then you must mix and knead the grain with water and yeast and salt. Then a fire must be built to heat a baking stone. This will not be like picking a pear off a tree and grabbing a few green beans out of the garden. Life will be different in its most basic context. He must start his own garden unlike before. And when he tills and plants he will sweat. Instead of bountiful and plentiful growth he will find weeds and thorns in his rows. This is blood, sweat and tears in place of picking and pruning. Finally, at the end of verse 19, Adam learns the full extent of his new promise. Even his body will get worse and wind down and decay. This most carefully fashioned creation of the Master designer will finally succumb to the new law written in its members. In Roman 8:22 we find that all of God's creation was effected this same way by Adam's sin. Yet this is not only a curse, it is a blessing. So Dr. Henry Morris points out that the entropy around us leaves us without hope in the carnal and should therefore turn us toward God.² In today's science-centered world, we know a lot more about this law written in our members. We call it the Second Law of Thermodynamics and it applies to the entire universe. The more we know about the decay around us the less excuse we have to ignore the regenerative power of God through His Son.

² Dr. Henry M. Morris, *The Defender's Study Bible*, p. 13, (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1995)

In the first covenant, Adam had been given work to do in the garden as well as a sphere of influence. Adam's work entailed "dressing" and "keeping" the garden. His daily chores no doubt consisted of maintaining and improving or organizing the vegetation. How can we imagine the extent of the change in the nature of work that Adam faced? In my mind I think of my trips to the pick-your-own apple farm as a typical day in the garden. Deciding which apples to take for the table and how many to take for baking. Perhaps some of those that landed on the ground will make a nice glass of refreshing cider! Then I think of a day outside the garden as the first day in the life of a pioneer. Before he can plant he has to fell trees and pull up stumps, or maybe he has to pull rocks and clear brush. Even after days of sweat he still has tilling and planting and weeding. Then, if the crop doesn't fail, he has harvesting and much more work to do. Meanwhile, he has a house to build and barn, too. He has to build fences and keep the animals out of the fields. He needs firewood and a source of water. One wonders how Adam survived that first year! But he was smarter than we are, no doubt, and stronger. The effects of the curse may have come on slowly so that there were some wild crops available if he ranged a ways for it. I wonder what he thought about while he was sweating? God gives us some insights. He was sorrowing v. 17 for his loss. He was experiencing the pain of thorns and thistles v. 18. I'll bet that those skins of animals chafed when he was sweaty and dirty v. 19, 21. I can imagine tears, many of them on many occasions. He was a man of sweat and a man of sorrows, a man pricked by thorns and marked for death. As was the first Adam, so would the last Adam be; the first because of his own sin, the last because of yours and mine.

The Noahic Covenant

Whereas the covenant with Adam and his progeny was one of personal responsibility greatly multiplied and personal liberty greatly reduced, it was not like the covenant that God gave to Noah and his three sons. Personal liberty was greatly reduced by the instituting of human government. Humans were given the duty of avenging blood for blood in the post-deluvian world. (Gen. 9:6) Under the Adamic covenant we saw Cain murder his brother, but God reserved judgment of that act to himself. (Gen. 4:15) No man was allowed to avenge Abel. After the flood, God made it a duty of men, and sometimes of beasts, to repay murder with the punishment of God-ordained remuneration in kind.

Oddly enough, God specifically in parts of the covenant included the animals that landed with Noah. He gave notice that the animals would be judged for killing men, even though men were given permission to kill the animals for food. Since this covenant continues today, we might be reminded of this fact when animal rights activists try to turn this command of God upside down. When an animal attacks a man its life is forfeited, because the life of a man is sacred and innocent blood may not be spilt. Conversely, the blood of an innocent animal was the only sin-cleansing sacrifice available on earth before Christ. This clearly shows the order of importance that God requires.

Part of the Noahic covenant reaffirms the order of nature. Replenishing the earth (9:1) is mentioned again as it was in past times. Then the covenant goes further by saying that now animals would fear men and that men could eat the flesh of animals.

One of the promises of God was universal in that it applied to all living things, animal as well as human. God promised never again to destroy all flesh off of the earth with a flood. Even the ground itself was promised that the whole earth would not again be underwater. This point may seem trivial and the idea of a rainbow somewhat trite, until you realize that this passage is the key to debunking the foolish religion of evolution. The universal flood is the only sane explanation for stratified and fossilized life all over the world. Liberal biblical (so called) scholars have tried to compromise with evolutionists and want to call the flood of Noah a local phenomenon, but this verse does not allow for that. Not only is the language very plain in saying that the whole world was flooded, but we know today that rainbows are to be seen everywhere on earth when the sun shines through rain or snow. It happens whether men are there to see it or not. It was happening at times when no men were present. That is because the bow is a sign of God's covenant with all of the earth that a worldwide flood will never again happen. If Noah's flood only happened in the Middle East then there would be no rainbows in South America.

The final thing I want to note about this covenant is actually the part mentioned first. In chapter 8, verse 22 we see the order of time and the repetitive nature of it. It is constantly changing, yet constantly the same until the earth itself no longer remains. These will remain: work, seen in sowing and reaping; the elements, seen in cold and heat; seasons, seen in summer and winter; and time, seen in day and night. Even darkness will stay with us to the end of the earth. Even with Christ on the throne of all the earth, there will be nightfall, darkness, sin.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The covenant that God made with Abram was different in many ways from any that had come before. The biggest difference is found in Genesis 12:1: God called one man out of the world. Being called out is an important concept and one that God will continue to use. No longer does God act directly to change all of humanity on earth at once. Mankind is seen as being more and more distant from God on the whole while one group, called out through one man, is drawn close into fellowship with their Lord Jehovah, the One that keeps His promises, the Jehovah-Jireh, the One who provides.

In Gen. 12:1-3 we see the first mention of God's promises to Abram. God goes to him and shows him a new vision of the future. God starts the process of promises. Abram will have many and powerful offspring; he would be blessed personally; his name would be associated with greatness; his life would be the conduit for blessing others. The Lord goes on to say that He will care for Abram by blessing those who bless him and cursing those that curse him (v.3). What a significant sentence spoken succinctly by God to a man from an idol-worshipping family. It concludes with the words, "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

After Abram had been in the land God had shown him, the covenant was restated in a moment when Abram needed comfort. Abram's nephew Lot had just separated from him under less than happy circumstances and he was now very much alone. In that hour God showed Abram the land and told him how his family would inherit all of it someday. God told him that his family would populate the whole of the land in his name. There is nothing listed as a stipulation, just an unconditional promise directly from the person of God.

The uniquely personal nature of the Abrahamic covenant is seen over and over. In chapter 15, verses 4-16, God once again reassures Abram that His promises are certain. Abram looks at the stars in the sky and believes God completely when He says that Abrams seed will be likewise innumerable. At this point, before God seals the covenant with a human ritual of covenant making, it is said of Abram that he believed in the Lord and had righteousness placed on his account.

The stating of the covenant in chapter 15 includes a bit of new information and is confirmed with a ceremony that includes a blood sacrifice. The new information is that the family of Abraham would spend time in Egypt; they'd be in bondage, but the Lord would deliver them out of Egypt with great substance, meaning that they would be extremely wealthy. The final bit of new information was that Abraham would live to be quite old.

When God next mentions his covenant with Abraham we find that He is ready to name the next individual that He will call out to Himself. The child would be the son that Sarah would give to Abraham. Again there is a token of God's covenant. Henry Morris has this to say about circumcision:

“As the rainbow encircling the whole earth was a token of God's covenant with all men (Gen. 9:17), so circumcision, encircling the channel by which the human seed is preserved and transmitted, especially the promised seed in the line of Abraham, is the token of God's covenant with His chosen nation.”³

So circumcision is not a condition of the covenant, but a token for the individual in the chosen line. As the thoughts and intents of their heart were between each man and his God, so this token is a reminder that the God who knows and sees in secret will reward openly with a great blessing of descendents.

The covenant that God made with Abraham, confirmed with Isaac (Gen. 22:17-18), and again confirmed with Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15), has a fulfillment that has yet to be seen. The seed through Isaac and the Seed, which is Christ, have never received all of the Promised Land or the recognition of the nations. There is yet to be a little while before it is completed in the reign of Christ on earth. Though it may seem that this covenant does not directly affect non-Jews today, it certainly does. Since this covenant continues today, even if in abeyance until the return of Christ, all nations and peoples and individuals must remember the blessings and cursings of Gen. 12:3.

Conclusion

We have considered four covenants with five men, but only one God. Our Lord does not go back on His word and the unconditional covenants continue among men today. The curses on Adam and the earth are in evidence every moment of every day. The rainbow appears in every corner of the earth. God is still calling out individuals to receive his blessings as they become sojourners in a world that is not theirs, and the promise of a kingdom and a final defeat of Satan are still to come. We must remember that God has made these promises and is a covenant keeping God. In the mean time, as He told Abraham, we must remember that He is also El-Shaddai, the all-sufficient. Or as Matthew Henry said, “He is a God that is enough.”⁴

³ Dr. Henry M. Morris, *The Defender's Study Bible*, p.40, (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1995).

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 33, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961).

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