

A Brief Sketch of My Theology by Earle Craig

Hebrews 1:1 God, after He spoke to the fathers long ago through the prophets in many portions and in many ways, **1:2** in these the last days has spoken to us through the Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, in view of whom also He makes the ages,¹ **1:3** who is the radiance of His glory and the likeness of His identity [my translation].

Because the author of Hebrews identifies God as the one who “makes the ages,” I see the creation as a story which God is telling and that features Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God. The main plot of the story is God’s gathering a people for Himself from all ethnic groups, both Jews and Gentiles, and granting them salvation from His justice that will include forgiveness of their sins along with eternal life and moral perfection in the Kingdom of God. This main plot is depicted on the Diagram of My Theology by the thick black and red arrows with the light purple rectangles and labels with this background color.² Jesus will rule over this kingdom, having qualified to do so by dying on the cross. His role in the kingdom includes that of King, High Priest, and Prophet of God’s eternal people. The New Testament most often (almost 500 times) uses the title of Christ, i.e., Messiah,³ to refer to Jesus. And God’s eternal people are all the sinners throughout history who choose to believe God and obey Him.

A sub-plot of the story that God is telling features Jesus as the King of the nation of Israel, as well as their High Priest and Prophet, who, when he returns, will rule over them as they live safely and securely on the land of Israel for “1,000 years,” symbolic in Revelation 20:4 of a long time. The sub-plot is depicted on

¹ Most English translations use the word “world” or “universe” to translate the Greek *αιωνας* (*aionas*), which literally means “ages.” But these words lead the Bible student to think that the author is referring to only the material stuff of creation. However, I think that by using *aionas*, the author means both the material and historical elements of the creation. In other words, the author is saying that God is constantly bringing into existence a story which He is telling and that features Jesus as His Son.

² The thick red arrows represent what the apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:4 calls “the mystery of the Messiah.” After Paul had first studied the Old Testament under the direction of the great Jewish teacher Gamaliel, he, like most Jews, was under the impression that Gentiles could obtain God’s blessing of eternal life only by becoming Jewish and obeying the Mosaic Covenant. But in Acts 9 Jesus literally stopped Paul dead in his tracks on the road to Damascus. And he assigned him the responsibility of being the apostle to the Gentiles. This resulted in Paul’s restudying and rethinking the entire Old Testament as motivated by the inward work of the Holy Spirit. His conclusion was that God all along intended the Messiah to suffer death on a cross and to provide salvation and eternal life to Gentiles by their faith and obedience to God without going through the Mosaic Covenant. These two important elements of biblical theology, 1) Jesus’ death with his resurrection and 2) the Gentiles’ obtaining eternal life *through only Jesus with no obligation to the Mosaic Covenant*, are what Paul means by “the mystery of the Messiah.” Paul says in Ephesians 3 that this mystery was completely cleared up by Jesus’ appearance to Israel as their Messiah with the end of this appearance being his death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus, the thick red arrows show that out of the covenants that appear strictly Jewish in the Old Testament, i.e., the Mosaic (Exodus-Deuteronomy), Davidic (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 2,8,89; etc.), and New (Jeremiah 31:31-34) Covenants, Jesus as the crucified Jewish Messiah unites believing Jews and believing Gentiles into one group who are reconciled to God through him and will live together in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Paul puts it this way in **Ephesians 3:1-7** – **1** On account of this, I Paul, the prisoner of the Messiah Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles... **2** since, indeed, you have heard of the arrangement of the grace of God which was given to me and intended for you, **3** that, according to a revelation, the mystery was made known to me, just as I wrote above in brief. **4** In regard to this, as you read, you are able to understand my grasp of the mystery of the Messiah, **5** which, in other generations, was not made known to the sons of men as it now has been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, **6** to the effect that the Gentiles are co-heirs, co-body members, and co-possessors of the promise in the Messiah Jesus by means of the good news, **7** of which I became a servant according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me in line with the operation of His power [my translation]. Paul also says succinctly in **Ephesians 2:11-13** – **11** Therefore, remember that formerly you, Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “the uncircumcised” by anyone who calls himself “the hand-made in the flesh circumcised,” **12** that you, in that season, were separated from the Messiah, excluded from the citizenry of Israel, even strangers to the covenants of promise, while you had no hope and were atheists in the world. **13** But now **in the Messiah Jesus**, you, who formerly were far away, have drawn near **by means of the Messiah’s blood** [my translation; emphasis mine].

³ The key Hebrew word in the Old Testament is *Mashiach*, which means Anointed One, i.e., a person who has olive oil poured over his head to signify that God is setting him apart for a unique and special role within Israel. The three unique roles are Priest (cf. Exodus 29:7), King (cf. 1 Kings 1:34; Psalm 2:2), and Prophet (cf. Psalm 105:15; Isaiah 61:1). We derive the English word Messiah from *Mashiach*, and the Greek translation of the Hebrew word is *Christos*, from which we derive the English word Christ. The Bible is therefore saying that Jesus is the final Anointed Priest, King, and Prophet of Israel and, by extrapolation, of the rest of the world, i.e., of all those who authentically believe in him.

my diagram by the light aqua rectangles and thin arrows, culminating in “The Millennial Kingdom.” This will be the first stage of the Kingdom of God in that He will resurrect believers who died in previous history and, along with living believers at the time of Jesus’ return, transform them into immortal and morally perfect beings who will reign with Jesus over not only the Jews, who will all be authentic Christians, but also the rest of the world of Gentile nations, in which some of them will also be genuine believers. In this way, the main plot of God’s story passes through and includes the sub-plot as an important element. Then, the second stage of the Kingdom of God will be the new earth of Revelation 21 on which Jesus and all believers from the present realm will live eternally as morally perfect human beings. Thus, both plots require Jesus to have lived, died, rise from the dead, ascend off the earth, and return at a time still future to us to restore the Kingdom of Israel and initiate the Kingdom of God.

Both plots also involve the four covenants which the Old Testament introduces—the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12-22), the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus-Deuteronomy), the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7, Psalms 2 & 8, etc.), and the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34, etc.). These covenants are contracts or agreements which God makes with certain people. The Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants are agreements between God and Jews (Abraham, David, and the Jewish nation respectively). However, Gentiles will enjoy a kind of direct effect in their fulfillment, both by being included in one of the promises to Abraham and through Jesus’ involvement in God’s fulfilling the Davidic and New Covenants.

The Mosaic Covenant is between God and only the Jews. Nevertheless, it is intended to affect Gentiles positively, so that they will enjoy a kind of indirect effect in its fulfillment. By watching the Jews, who teach them about God’s character through their keeping the Mosaic Covenant, Gentiles are intended to become attracted to Him and obey Him—even though they have no obligation like the Jews to keep the covenant. Below is a brief description of the four covenants.

I. The Foundational, National, and International Purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant

About 2000 B.C., God speaks to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3,

Genesis 12:1 Now the LORD said to [Abraham],
“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 [NAS95].”

In these verses, God makes three promises to Abraham –

- 1) That his physical descendants, the Jews, will become the greatest nation in human history and live securely on the land of Israel.
- 2) That God will grant Abraham the blessing of resurrection from the dead and eternal life.
- 3) That God will make Abraham’s name great by having him play the role of the prominent, historical believer, such that God will grant the blessing of resurrection from the dead and eternal life to anyone who believes in God and obeys Him in the same manner as Abraham. These believers

will be members of all the various ethnic groups around the world. Some will be Jews, and some will be Gentiles.⁴

Because the Abrahamic Covenant addresses the future blessing of both Jews and Gentiles, it is foundational for understanding the rest of the Bible. God promises that the Jews will eventually become the most powerful and influential nation in history. The rest of the Bible demonstrates that He remains committed to this promise in spite of the Jews' repeated disobedience, including their rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. But God also promises eternal life to both Jews and Gentiles, and He remains committed to this promise by changing the hearts of individual sinners in all nations throughout history and by sending His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, to die for them that they may receive forgiveness and entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Subsequently, as I describe below, each of the three covenants after the Abrahamic Covenant adds another important element to God's fulfilling its promises.

II. The National and International Purpose of the Mosaic Covenant

Around 1500 B.C., God rescues the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and meets their leader Moses at Mt. Sinai to present them with the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant. These commandments add another important element to God's promise in the Abrahamic Covenant to only the Jews. Therefore, it is strictly a *national* covenant, but, as we will see, it has *international* implications. To demonstrate its *national* nature, Moses says to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:1,

Deuteronomy 4:1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you [NAS95]."

Moses is referring to the Israelites' taking over the land of Canaan and making it their own in 1500 B.C. But he is also saying that the condition which God has placed on them to become the most powerful nation in human history is their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant *from their hearts*. Moses later explicitly states that their obedience cannot be external only, but must include this internal and inward component,

Deuteronomy 10:12 "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **13** and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?...**16** **So circumcise your heart** and stiffen your neck no longer [NAS95, emphasis mine]").

To demonstrate the *international* implications of this covenant, Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:5-8,

Deuteronomy 4:5 "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. **6** So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' **7** For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? **8** Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today [NAS95]?"

⁴ A Jew is anyone descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, and therefore a member of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. All the rest of human beings, including Abraham's son Ishmael with his descendants and Isaac's son Esau with his descendants, are Gentiles.

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These verses show that, by their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, the Jews will provide a living signpost of their God for all Gentile peoples to observe. They will instruct the world in who Yahweh is—the one true God. This is because, with the commandments of the covenant, God has given the nation of Israel the proper wisdom to live life skillfully, and their obedience to these commandments is intended to reveal that He is loving, just, merciful, and faithful to His people Israel and to all other people who embrace Him as their God. These are the *international* implications of the covenant.

But the Mosaic Covenant also points to Jesus as the final leader of Israel. In Deuteronomy 18:15&19, Moses says,

Deuteronomy 18:15 “Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen. You shall listen to him!... **19** It shall come about that whoever will not listen to [God’s] words which he shall speak in [God’s] name, [He] will avenge [Himself] on him [my translation].”

These verses show that the Mosaic Covenant predicts another leader and prophet (spokesman for God) like Moses whom the nation of Israel are required to follow. If they reject this leader and prophet, they will lose their opportunity to participate in God’s fulfilling His promise to Abraham to mold the Jews into the greatest nation in history. As the apostle Peter says in quoting these verses in Acts 3:23, the Jew who rejects this prophet will be “cut off from his people” (cf. Exodus 30:33, etc.). And Peter makes it clear that this prophet is Jesus of Nazareth, the one who will return to bring about the “restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time (3:21),” i.e., the reestablishment of the Kingdom of Israel that will constitute their becoming the primary world power according to God’s promise.

Also, the Mosaic Covenant both threatens the Jews with expulsion from the land of Israel if they disobey it and promises them safety and security on the land if they obey it. Deuteronomy 28:10,13 and 30:5-6 demonstrate this.

Deuteronomy 28:10 “[If you obey the Mosaic Covenant], all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will be afraid of you... **13** The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully [NAS95].”

Deuteronomy 30:5 “The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. **6** Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live [NAS95].”

At the beginning of Deuteronomy 28, Moses threatens the Jews with being expelled from the land of Israel if they disobey the Mosaic Covenant. This actually took place around 700 B.C. when the Assyrians destroyed the northern Kingdom of Israel and around 600 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the southern Kingdom of Judah. However, as stated above in Deuteronomy 28:10,13 & 30:5-6, God had assured the Jews 900 years earlier that He will remain faithful to the Abrahamic promise and eventually make them powerful over all the world by causing them to become authentic believers in Him as Abraham was. The Old Testament prophets, Isaiah through Malachi, and the book of Revelation indicate that this will occur when the Messiah returns. And we know from the New Testament that the Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth.

III. The National and International Purpose of the Davidic Covenant

God makes this covenant in 2 Samuel 7:9-16 with King David around 1000 B.C.,

2 Samuel 7:9 “I [Yahweh] have been with you [David] wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. **10** I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, **11** even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you [David] rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. **12** 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. **13** He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. **14** I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, **15** but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. **16** Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever [NAS95].”

In this passage, God makes five promises to David:

- 1) Like His promise to Abraham, that He will make David’s name great, because David’s role is to be the ancestor and forerunner of the final and eternal king and Messiah of Israel and the Gentiles.
- 2) Like His promise to Abraham, that He will grant the Jews a land on this earth where they will live securely and safely.
- 3) That, just as he has been God’s Son, David’s son will be God’s Son, so that his descendants will continue to be God’s Sons, including and especially the final king of Israel.
- 4) That, as God’s Son like David, Solomon, not David, will build a temple for God.
- 5) That the Davidic line of kings and therefore his kingdom will last forever.

We now know from the New Testament that the line of the Davidic kings of Israel culminated in and ended with Jesus, the final “Son of God.” According to the Old Testament prophets and Revelation, it is he, when he returns, who will rule over the restored Kingdom of Israel as well as the Gentile nations of the earth. This is the Millennial Kingdom of Revelation 20 and will be the first stage of the Kingdom of God in which all believers from all history, both Jews and Gentiles, from Abel to the last believer of this present realm, will participate. Then, we find out from Revelation 21 & 22 that Jesus is the eternal ruler of the Kingdom of God, so that all believers from all history, both Jews and Gentiles, will serve him and enjoy everlasting existence on the new earth as the second stage of the Kingdom of God.

The *national* nature of the Davidic Covenant is that Jesus will rule over the Jews when God fulfills His promise to Abraham and they become the most powerful nation in history. In this way, the Davidic Covenant adds the element of a monarchy to this Abrahamic promise. The *international* nature of the Davidic Covenant is that King Jesus also rules over God’s eternal people made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. Thus, the Davidic Covenant also adds the element of a monarchy to God’s promise to Abraham to bless with eternal life all believers like him.

IV. The National and International Purpose of the New Covenant

About 600 B.C., as the Babylonians are in the process of destroying the southern Kingdom of Judah, Jeremiah makes the following prediction in regard to the Jews and the New Covenant,

Jeremiah 31:31 “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, **32** 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, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. **33** “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “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. **34** They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more [NAS95].”

In this passage, God promises to make a New Covenant with the entire nation of Israel. He repeats His statement from Deuteronomy 30:6 that at some time in the future He will change the hearts of all living Jews. Therefore, the new feature in the New Covenant is that God promises to forgive all their sins. The author of Hebrews in the New Testament explains that it is this promise that makes the New Covenant different from the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant, with its priests who are sinners and its *continuous* animal sacrifices, is inadequate to provide the Jews with God's eternal mercy. Only Jesus as the morally perfect Son of God, with his *one* sacrifice on the cross, qualifies to be a permanent High Priest between God and sinners so that his appeal to God the Father for their eternal forgiveness and life is effective.

Thus, Jesus is the long-expected Messiah (Anointed One, Christ, King, High Priest, Ruler, Judge), who becomes God's instrument of mercy and leadership—on the one hand, for the Jews and God's shaping them into the greatest nation in history when Jesus returns, and on the other hand, for Jews and Gentiles as a result of God's causing them to be inwardly committed to Him and Jesus for the sake of obtaining eternal life. In this way, the New Covenant is *national* in its purpose for the Jews, so that they will all be inwardly changed and forgiven during the restored Kingdom of Israel, i.e., the Millennial Kingdom of Revelation 20, which is the first stage of the Kingdom of God. And it adds to the Abrahamic Covenant the element of Jesus as a single sacrificial offering to God and an eternal Advocate for Jewish sinners who live in the Millennial Kingdom.

The New Covenant is also *international* in its purpose for both Jews and Gentiles, who throughout history in the present realm become authentic believers. God changes them inwardly through His Spirit, and they obtain eternal life by God's forgiving them through Jesus' intercession. As similarly stated in the previous paragraph, this covenant adds the element of Jesus as the unique sacrificial offering to God and an eternal Advocate for all believers (cf. 1 John 2:1,2). God will resurrect both Jewish and Gentile believers who died in previous history and, along with living believers at the time of Jesus' return, transform them into immortal and morally perfect beings who will reign with Jesus over not only Israel but also the rest of the world of Gentile nations. God will also change the hearts of all Jews who live on the land of Israel and some Gentiles in the rest of the world during the time of the Millennial Kingdom. As already stated, this will be the first stage of the Kingdom of God. Then, all believers, who became such either before or during the Millennial Kingdom, will obtain life in the second stage of the Kingdom of God on the new and eternal earth after the present realm is destroyed.

Here is Revelation 21:1-4 that refers to the new creation and the new earth on which believers, who are called the New Jerusalem, will dwell forever —

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea [i.e., no longer any Gentiles who oppose God]. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, **4** and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" [NAS95].

V. Summary of My Theology

God is telling the main story of His granting eternal mercy and life to Jewish and Gentile sinners whose hearts He changes so that they believe in Him and obey Him even in their current immoral condition. He is also telling the story of forming the Jewish people into the greatest nation in all human history, which will occur when Jesus returns and he inaugurates the first stage of the Kingdom of God.

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Through the Abrahamic Covenant, God has promised the Jews their great status, and He has promised eternal life to both Jews and Gentiles who become believers like Abraham. Through the Mosaic Covenant, God has stipulated His condition of changed hearts and obedience for the Jews to achieve their greatness, and He has assured them that He will cause them eventually to meet this condition. In addition, by meeting the condition, they will instruct all other peoples in the knowledge of God as good, just, loving, faithful, and merciful. Through the Davidic Covenant, God has promised that David's descendants will be kings of Israel, and especially that, when Israel finally lives safely and securely on the land of Israel, it will be because of one special descendant of David who will reign as God's everlasting Son. Through the New Covenant, God has promised that He will forgive the sins of the Jews whose hearts He changes, which will eventually be the case for all of them living during the time of Israel's greatness.

The New Testament teaches that, through his death and resurrection, Jesus of Nazareth, as Son of God and Messiah, is the means by which and the basis on which God fulfills all His promises. Consequently, he is King and High Priest of the believing Jews and believing Gentiles, both mortal and immortal, during first the Millennial Kingdom of Israel's greatness. Then, after God has finished transforming all believers into both immortal and morally perfect beings, Jesus rules over them in the second and eternal stage of the Kingdom of God on the new earth.