

apart from anything they do (*Rom 11:5-6; Eph 2:8-9; 2 Tim 1:9*). Jesus purchased a people by his death on the cross so that they *all* receive full forgiveness of sins and become incurable God-lovers by the Holy Spirit. The New Covenant is the *spiritual* fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

(5) Israel and The Church

Israel in the Old Covenant era was a temporary, unbelieving *picture* of the true people of God, the Church. There always existed a small remnant of believers within unbelieving Israel. When Jesus Christ came, the *picture* of the people of God gave way to the true people of God consisting of both Jew and Gentile.

(6) Law

The version of law in the Old Covenant era was the Mosaic Law, which included the Ten Commandments. The Mosaic Law has passed away with the coming of Christ and the New Covenant (*2 Cor 3:7-13*). God no longer requires people to follow the Mosaic Law. The version of law in the New Covenant era is “*the Law of Christ*” (*Gal 6:2*), which includes the commands of Christ that pertain to the New Covenant era (*John 14:15, 21; 1 John 2:1-5*) and the commands of his Apostles (*1 Cor 14:37*).

(7) Circumcision and Baptism

Under the Old Covenant, circumcision was the physical picture of regeneration. It signified that a person was physically born into the unbelieving people of God, Israel. It was given to all the sons of Israel, irrespective of repentance and faith. Under the New Covenant, baptism is the outward sign that regeneration has occurred (*Col 2:11-12*). It signifies that one has been spiritually born into the believing people of God, the Church. It is given to all those who give evidence of regeneration, which is repentance and faith.

How Do The Abrahamic, Old, and New Covenants Fit Together?

Much of Scripture is devoted to explaining or recording how the Lord fulfills the promises he made to Abraham. People get confused as to exactly how the Abrahamic Covenant is fulfilled and how it relates to other covenants. The Abrahamic Covenant contains both the Old and New Covenants. That is, the *Old* and *New* Covenants are the *physical* and *spiritual* fulfillments of the Abra-

hamic Covenant. The covenant God made with Abraham reveals God’s plan to save a people and bring them into his land. Under the Old Covenant, God *physically* saves the people of Israel (the physical descendants of Abraham) from the Egyptians and brings them into the Promised Land, Palestine. Under the New Covenant, God *spiritually* saves his people (the spiritual descendants of Abraham) from sin and condemnation and brings them into the spiritual land (salvation rest now and in heaven). Thus, the Abrahamic Covenant *contains* both the Old and the New Covenants. How does all this fit together?

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT PHYSICALLY FULFILLED

When we read about Israel under the Mosaic Covenant, we are actually reading the historical record of God’s *physical fulfillment* of the Abrahamic promise. Under the Old Covenant God brings the physical descendants of Abraham into the land he promised them and gives them *physical* rest. As we examine the Abrahamic Covenant, we find that physical or blood relationship to Abraham is a dominant theme. All of the physical descendants of Abraham and Sarah were included in the covenant made with Abraham. Belief was not necessary. It was through *physical* birth that one became part of the Abrahamic Covenant in its *physical* form. See the promises God made to Abraham:

...the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. (*Gen 15:1-7*)

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said

unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed [descendants] after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (*Gen 17:1-8*)

God promises Abraham that **(1)** he will have many physical descendants, **(2)** God will be their God, and **(3)** they will possess the land of Canaan. These important promises are repeated throughout Genesis—they would be a great nation (*Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 18:18*), God’s own people (*Gen 17:2,7,8; 18:19*), and possess the Promised Land (*Gen 12:7; 15:18-21; 17:8*). How and when were these promises fulfilled?

The Promise of “Many Descendants” Physically Fulfilled

The nation of Israel was made up of the physical descendants of Abraham. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of “many descendants” can be seen before they came out of Egypt: “The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them” (*Exodus 1:7*).

The Promise “I Will Be Their God” Physically Fulfilled

The nation of Israel in the Old Covenant era enjoyed special national status and a type of adoption by God.

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the

house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (*Deut 7:6-8*)

God had a relationship with the Israelites that he did not have with any other nation. It was not a *saving* relationship in which the Israelites were *spiritually* redeemed, but the entire nation was *physically* redeemed and chosen to be the recipients of God’s love in a way that no one else was at that time. God protected them and fought on their side. He talked to them and gave them the Scriptures. And the Messiah came into the world through them.

The Promise of “Possession of the Land” Physically Fulfilled

Old Covenant Israel enjoyed physical rest in the land of Canaan. In fact, the book of Joshua says that when the Israelites had finally taken most of the land, *all* of the promises given to Abraham had been fulfilled:

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass. (*Joshua 21:43-45*)

This tells us that God made good on his word to Abraham. His promises of rest and possession of the land had been fulfilled, just like his promises of many descendants and a special relationship with God. It was *all* fulfilled by the time of the conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT SPIRITUALLY FULFILLED

The New Covenant is the *spiritual* fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Under the New Covenant God gives birth to the *spiritual* descendants of Abraham. These descendants get an *everlasting* possession of a *spiritual* land (also seen as *spiritual rest* in the New Testament). They are brought into a relationship with God, adopted by him, and he promises to love them forever and never punish them.

The Promise of “Many Descendants” Spiritually Fulfilled

In the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised Abraham “many descendants”—“Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou

be able to number them... So shall thy seed be" (*Gen 15:5*). Not only is this a promise of "many descendants," but this promise pointed ahead to *Jesus Christ*, the one true Seed of Abraham. How do we know this? God revealed it in the New Covenant Scriptures:

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. (*Gal 3:16*)

But Paul also goes on to identify all those who have trusted in Christ alone for their salvation to be the spiritual seed of Abraham:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (*3:28,29*)

Paul lets us know that being a seed or descendant of Abraham in the New Covenant sense has nothing to do with blood relation to Abraham as it did in the Old Covenant era. All of those who belong to Christ, both Jew and Gentile, are the true recipients of the promise spoken to Abraham. Jesus Christ and the Church are the *spiritual* or New Covenant fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of "many descendants."

The Promise "I Will Be Their God" Spiritually Fulfilled

The relationship of God to the physical nation of Israel in the Old Covenant era was qualitatively different from his relationship to all those who are in the New Covenant. The Israelites were "loved," "chosen," and "redeemed" by God, but most of them perished because of unbelief (*Heb 3:19*). God did not set his saving love on all of those people. God did not choose Israel the nation in the same sense he chose believers before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (*Eph 1:4*). Israel was *physically* redeemed but not *spiritually* redeemed. Certainly they did not deserve the amazing favor God bestowed on them. He gave them the Old Covenant, filled with types and shadows of the gospel, which no one else in the world possessed.

In Hebrews 8:7-12, the author describes the New Covenant and how it contrasts the Old or Mosaic Covenant:

The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their

forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. (*vv8,9NIV*)

Notice that the New Covenant "*will not be like*" the Mosaic Covenant. In what way will it be different? The text goes on to spell it out:

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (*v10*)

Although Old Covenant Israel was God's people and he was their God *in a sense*, there is another sense in which this was never accomplished in the Old Covenant era. That's what this passage is highlighting. It took the work of Christ on the cross, which established the New Covenant, to bring about the *spiritual* fulfillment of this Abrahamic promise. That is, Christ purchased complete forgiveness of sins and a God-loving heart for every last person in the New Covenant. The result of this is that unlike the nation of Israel in the Old Covenant era, those in the New Covenant can actually approach God now through Christ. God is no longer our eternal enemy but our loving Father and King. That is what it means for God to be our God.

In Hebrews 10, the author contrasts the work of Christ and the work of the priesthood of the Old Covenant. The Levitical priests were unable to make the believer acceptable to God, while Jesus' priestly work on the cross accomplished this:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (*10:19*)

Christ purchased the *spiritual* fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. He paid the ultimate price at Calvary in order that we might be reconciled to God.

The Promise of "Possession of the Land" Spiritually Fulfilled

The New Testament treats the land promise made to Abraham as a promise of true *spiritual rest* for God's true people. Joshua only gave them physical rest in the physical

land. We saw that the Israelites did in fact receive this rest, but Hebrews 4 tells us that Joshua never gave them true *spiritual* rest. Let's look at this apparent contradiction:

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass. (*Joshua 21:43-45*)

If Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (*Heb 4:8-11*)

These Scriptures seem to be in direct conflict until we take into account the way *rest* and *land* are being interpreted in Hebrews 3 & 4. The wilderness generation in the book of Exodus was not allowed to "*enter God's rest*," meaning they were not allowed to enter *the Promised Land*. This is understood in Hebrews 3 to mean that they did not obtain salvation. Joshua, however, *did* take the Israelites into the Promised Land and they were given rest from their physical enemies. But the author of Hebrews is pointing past a physical fulfillment concerning physical land and rest from war to a *spiritual rest*. The promise of Canaan as an *everlasting* possession is finally and ultimately fulfilled with the *everlasting* possession of our eternal salvation.

Understanding the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant, the Old Covenant, and the New Covenant gives us indispensable insight into how Scripture fits together. The Abrahamic Covenant contains both the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant is the *physical* fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, and the New Covenant is the *spiritual* fulfillment. □

— Steve Lehrer

The Abrahamic Covenant, The Old Covenant & The New Covenant

Understanding the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant, the Old Covenant, and the New Covenant allows one to have a grasp on how Scripture fits together. The Abrahamic Covenant contains both the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant is the *physical* fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, and the New Covenant is the *spiritual* fulfillment. What follows is a brief overview of these truths. But first, let's open with seven introductory statements:

(1) The Cross

By his death on the cross Jesus purchased both complete forgiveness of sins past, present, and future as well as a changed life or new heart for all of his own. Believers love Christ more than sin and are characterized by repentance when they sin. Christ's work on the cross is the New Covenant.

(2) Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant reveals God's plan to save a people and take them into his land. The Old Covenant with the nation of Israel and the Promised Land is a temporary *picture* of what is accomplished by the New Covenant, by which Jesus actually purchased a people and will take them to be with him forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

(3) Old Covenant

The Old or Mosaic Covenant is a legal or works covenant that God made with Israel on Mount Sinai (*Exod 19:3-6; Deut 28:1-4ff, 15-19; Jer 11:1-11*). This covenant is brought to an end and is fulfilled at the cross (*Matt 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; Acts 13:29; Heb 8:13; 10:9*). It was never intended to save people, but instead its purpose was to cause sin to abound and increase guilt until the coming of the Savior (*Rom 5:20*). Israel, under the Mosaic Covenant, was the *physical* fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

(4) New Covenant

The New Covenant is a gracious covenant. In other words, those included in the covenant are reconciled to God *by grace alone*