

Divine Covenant: Conditional or Unconditional?

1. What is the difference between a conditional and unconditional covenant? Need help? Consider using a Bible dictionary!

2. Study the Bible passages and fill out the table:

Bible Passage	Who With?	Conditional?	Part of Another Covenant?
Genesis 9:8-11			
Genesis 15:12-21			
Exodus 19:4-6			
Deuteronomy 30:1-10			
2 Samuel 7:8-16			
Jerimiah 31:31-34			

Genesis 9:8-11, ESV

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

Genesis 15:12-21, ESV

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

Exodus 19:4-6, ESV

'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

Deuteronomy 30:1-10, ESV

“And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. And the Lord your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord and keep all his commandments that I command you today. The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, when you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

2 Samuel 7:8-16, ESV

“Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Jeremiah 31:31-34, ESV

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

**Divine Covenant: Conditional or Unconditional?
Teacher Notes**

1. What is the difference between a conditional and unconditional covenant? Need help? Consider using a Bible dictionary!

Help the student learn how to discover the meaning of words using resources grounded in the Bible (i.e. Bible dictionary).

Conditional covenant – an agreement that has conditions / requirements or certain terms between two parties. A good example of this is the Mosaic Covenant where God blesses those who obey His Law and curses those who disobey His Law. This type of covenant is bilateral.

Unconditional covenant – an agreement that has no conditions or requirements of the other party. This type of covenant is unilateral, because only one party does something regardless of the other party. A good example of this is the Abrahamic Covenant where God unilaterally made promises of blessings to Abraham who does not have to do anything to receive those blessings.

2. Study the Bible passages and fill out the table:

To help the student summarize his observations and thoughts, consider reproducing the table that everyone could see and fill out as he tackles and discusses each passage. There are six Bible passages to review, which may be a lot for your student. There are a couple ways of making this easier for the student:

- 1) The teacher can dramatically read each passage and have the student question and answer along the way. If presented as a game, it could be a fun exercise.
- 2) Students can be split into teams and tackle a passage or two and share their findings to the class.

Encourage the student to write on the Bible passage to help develop the skill of observation. Circle the party that God is making the covenant with.

Genesis 9:8-11, ESV

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

Answer: Noah, Noah's offspring, all creatures on the ark, and every beast on the earth.

Ask the student what God promised. God's promise: Never again a flood to destroy the earth.

Genesis 15:12-21, ESV

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

Answer: Abram who will be later renamed Abraham.

Inform the student that God's promise to Abraham is spread over several passages.

Genesis 12:1-3: make Abram's name great, make Abram a great nation, blessings and protection, through Abram all the people of the earth shall be blessed.

Genesis 15:12-21: the additional promise of land between the Nile and Euphrates Rivers to Abram's descendants.

Genesis 17:1-8: the additional promise that Abram will be a father of many nations which is the cause of changing Abram's name to Abraham, and kings will come through his descendants.

Exodus 19:4-6, ESV

'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

Answer: the nation of Israel.

Inform the student that this is called the Mosaic Covenant, because the nation of Israel feared God and asked Moses to intercede for them (i.e. represent them). This conditional covenant is also known as the Law, because it was the means that God used to teach the nation what sin was and how to atone (pay the penalty of sin) so that they can be holy.

God promised that if the nation of Israel obeyed His covenant, they will be His kingdom of priests and holy nation, and this enabled access into the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 30:1-10, ESV

"And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. And the Lord your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord and keep all his commandments that I command you today. The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, when you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Answer: the nation of Israel.

Inform the student that this is known as the Land Covenant. It was made 40 years after the Mosaic Covenant and is conditional. Because it elaborates on the promise of land to Abraham's descendants in the Abrahamic Covenant, it is eternal.

Failure to uphold their commitment to the Mosaic Covenant would cause God to scatter Israel all over the world (Deut 29:2-30:1).

By obeying the Lord your God "with all your heart and soul," God will regather His people from around the world and "bring you into the land" (Deut 30:2-5). Once into the land, God promises many blessings.

2 Samuel 7:8-16, ESV

“Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Answer: David

Ask the student what God promised. God’s promise: David’s name will be great, a place will be appointed for God’s people to safely live, and a descendant will be king and establish an everlasting Davidic kingdom.

Jeremiah 31:31-34, ESV

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Answer: the whole Jewish nation

Inform the student that because of Israel’s failure to uphold their covenant promises, Jerusalem is about to be destroyed and the Jews exiled to foreign lands. With the Mosaic Covenant no longer in force, how do the descendants of Abraham receive the land God promised to Abraham?

Instruct the student to circle the word “new covenant” in the Jeremiah 31 passage. God’s wonderful answer is the New Covenant.

God will bestow the Holy Spirit within the descendant of Abraham (Ezek 36:25-28).

God will forgive past, present, and future sins (Jer 31:34).

The completed table might look like this:

Bible Passage	Who With?	Conditional?	Part of Another Covenant?
Genesis 9:8-11 Noahic Covenant	Noah, his sons, the animals on the ark, and all the beasts of the earth	No	No
Genesis 15:12-21 Abrahamic Covenant	Abram who was later renamed Abraham	No	No
Exodus 19:4-6 Mosaic Covenant	Nation of Israel	Yes	No
Deuteronomy 30:1-10 Land Covenant	Nation of Israel	Yes	Yes, part of the Abrahamic Covenant and with the conditions of the Mosaic
2 Samuel 7:8-16 Davidic Covenant	David	No	Yes, part of the Abrahamic Covenant
Jeremiah 31:31-34 New Covenant	Nation of Israel including both Northern and Southern Kingdoms – the children of Abraham	No	Yes, part of the Abrahamic Covenant