

# How Scripture Fits Together

## The Physical and Spiritual Fulfillments of the Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant 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 places them in the Promised Land, Palestine. Under the New Covenant, God spiritually saves believers (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.

### The Mosaic Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant (historically worked out) is the physical fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Under the Old Covenant we see God bringing the physical descendants of Abraham into the land He promised them and giving them physical rest.

### Abraham's Physical Descendants

All of the physical descendants of Abraham (and Sarah) and their slaves were included in the covenant made with Abraham. All who received the sign of the covenant (circumcision) were a part of the covenant. Belief was not necessary to become part of the Old Covenant people of God. It was through physical birth that one became part of the Abrahamic Covenant. *Genesis 15:1-5, 17:1-8*

### The Not So Holy Nation: Old Covenant Israel

The nation of Israel in the Old Covenant era enjoyed special national status and a type of adoption even though most of them were unbelieving. They were holy in that they were set apart physically and they did get special treatment, but they were not morally holy. *Romans 9:6-9; Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 2 Kings 21:14-15; Malachi 3:7*

### The Israelites Received Their Rest

Old Covenant Israel enjoyed physical rest in the Promised Land, but not true spiritual rest. *Joshua 21:43-45; Hebrews 4:8-11*

### The New Covenant

The New Covenant (historically worked out) is the spiritual fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Under the New Covenant we see God bringing the spiritual descendants of Abraham into the spiritual land He promised them and giving them spiritual rest.

### Jesus Christ is Abraham's True Seed

The promise of the Abrahamic Covenant pointed ahead to Jesus Christ, the one true Seed of Abraham. No one would have understood this without God revealing this truth through the New Covenant Scriptures. *Genesis 15:1-5; Galatians 3:16*

### The Church is Abraham's Spiritual Seed

All of those who belong to Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile, are the true recipients of the promise spoken to Abraham. *Galatians 3:29, John 1:10-13, John 3:3-8*

### The Truly Holy Nation: The Church

Old Covenant Israel was an unbelieving picture of the true people of God, the church. *Exodus 19:5-6, 1 Peter 2:9-10, 1 Corinthians 10:1-11*

### The Promised Land: A Picture of Heaven

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. *Hebrews 4:8-11*

## The Football Illustration: An Attempt to Illustrate How Scripture Fits Together

### A Preliminary Word About Metaphors and Analogies

We have written the following analogy to illustrate how the covenants fit together. The different parts of the illustration only have the theological meaning as we have specified and we ask the reader not to look for any further meaning in our illustration. When Jesus Christ says, “I am the gate” (*John 10:7*) he is saying he is like a gate only in a particular sense which is clearly laid out in the context in which He uses the metaphor. We must not speculate about the meaning of the hinges on the gate. Christ only intended those aspects of the metaphor to have meaning that he specified to have meaning. So also, we are likening a football game to God’s work in redemptive history and how the covenants fit together only in the ways we have specified. The illustration is written in bold. All regular non-bold text is explanation or interpretation of the illustration.<sup>1</sup>

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**It’s game day! As you enter the crowded stadium you buy a program that explains the overall plan for the big game. The program doesn’t provide every detail of the game, but it gives you enough information so you won’t be confused when the game begins.**

The program represents the Abrahamic Covenant and it tells you in very simple terms what God is going to do in the “game.” The game is the history of redemption or God’s plan to save worked out in real time. The Abrahamic Covenant lays out the plan that God is going to save a people and bring them into a land.

**After you enter the stadium and make your way to your seat, the first thing you notice is the field where the game will be played.**

The field represents the earth. God guarantees that the earth will remain until He is done saving a people and bringing them into His land in the Noahic Covenant (*Genesis 9:8-17*).

**As you are reading your program, suddenly the pre-game preparation begins. The game has not yet begun as outlined in the program, but the players are gathered together on the appropriate sides of the field and they begin to warm up for the game. The pre-game preparation is vital to the success of the game, but it is not the game itself.**

The pre-game represents the book of Genesis up through Exodus 19. In the pre-game or patriarchal period, God is preparing both the earth and the people for their part in God’s work of redeeming a people for Himself. He moves them where they need to be in order to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham to save a people and bring them into His land.

**Finally the game begins. As the game progresses, someone comes to your seat from time to time and gives you additions to the program. These additions do not replace your program, but they provide more detailed information as the game progresses and are useful in understanding why things occur in the game the way they do. They help you to see more clearly what is happening at every point of the game. Soon, you have in your possession a large number of additions to the original program and as you sort through them, you realize that there has been no activity on the field for quite some time. Likewise, no one has come to your seat with more additions to the program in quite some time. Following a lengthy delay, you begin to wonder if the game is over. While musing over whether or not the game is finished,**

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<sup>1</sup> Idea by Geoff Volker. Originally written by Mike Adams. Revised and expanded by Steve Lehrer. See Mike Adam’s paper “In Defense of the New Covenant” at <http://www.newcovenant.ws/doctor/defense.html> for the original version of the illustration and a thoughtful response to Richard Barcellos’ book *The Death of The Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology*.

**an announcer comes over the PA system proclaiming the start of the second half of the game. At such an announcement, your interest is peaked because until that point, you had no idea that the game was going to be played in two halves. The additions to the program you've received so far haven't been clear enough to lead you to that conclusion.**

The additions to the program at this point in the game are the Old Testament scriptures, which were not given all at once, but were provided in small portions over time (Hebrews 1:1). The lengthy delay is the intertestamental period in which God does not give any new revelation for about 400 years. Without the new revelation a reader of the Old Testament might begin to wonder if God is finished with Israel after their repeated rebellion. The announcement of the second half represents John the Baptist and the period of the incarnation. This was a period in which the Old Covenant was still in force but Jesus was coming to announce the New Covenant that was to be inaugurated by His death and resurrection.

**A short time after the start of the second half, someone comes to your seat and gives you one final addition to the program. It is only after you receive this final addition that you fully understand what the game is all about. Without this final addition, your knowledge of the game was incomplete and you understood it in a limited way. What you understood in a limited way prior to receiving the final addition, you now understand fully and are able to make sense of both how the game is played and it's intent. Now as you read the program in its fullness, you realize that the game is being played in two halves. The first half is finished and the second half is now underway. Now you understand that the first half only begins the game; it's not the entire game as you initially assumed. In fact, the first half is incomplete without the second half. Now it is clear to you that the first half cannot be understood correctly without the final addition to the program provided during the second half. It is the second half that brings the game to its conclusion.**

The first half of the game represents the Old Covenant; the second half represents the New Covenant. The Old Covenant is not the New and the New is not the Old, but understanding how they fit together is crucial to understanding the God's overall plan. The Old isn't called "Old" until the New begins. The additions to the program given in the second half of the game represent the scriptures of the New Covenant era, the New Testament. Without them, the game cannot be correctly understood (*Ephesians 3:2-6; Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:10-12*). Only after receiving them, do you realize that God's plan to save a people and bring them into His land (the Abrahamic covenant) contains both the Old and New Covenants and one is a picture of the other. If you read the Old Testament in isolation from the New Testament, which is what everyone had to do prior to the writing of the New Testament, you might begin to wonder if God's work in redeeming a people was over because God was already faithful in making a physical people and bringing them into a physical land. But the New Testament gives you more information about God's intentions. The Old Covenant was only a physical picture of what God was going to do in the New Covenant through the sacrifice of His only Son. What was written in the Abrahamic Covenant (God's intention to save a people and bring them into a land) ultimately applies to a spiritual people, the church, in a spiritual land, heaven (Hebrews 4:1-11; 11:40). This wasn't fully revealed until the New Testament Scriptures were written.