Dr. Jeffrey Niehaus, Biblical Theology, Session 6, Mosaic Covenant, Part 1
Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Niehaus, Biblical Theology, Session 6, Mosaic Covenant, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Niehaus's lecture on Biblical Theology, Session 5, focuses on the Abrahamic Covenant. It begins by establishing the context following the Adamic and Noahic covenants, emphasizing that while God interacted with Abraham in Genesis 12, the formal covenant wasn't established until Genesis 15. **The lecture highlights key aspects of this covenant, including the promise of land, numerous descendants, and blessing to the nations through Abraham's seed, which is understood to be Christ.** Niehaus analyzes the covenant ceremony in light of ancient Near Eastern treaty structures, proposing the Lord's passage between the animal pieces symbolized his commitment to uphold the covenant even if Abraham's descendants failed. **The session further explores how the Abrahamic Covenant foreshadows and relates to later covenants, including the Mosaic, Davidic, and ultimately the New Covenant, emphasizing its enduring significance in God's redemptive plan.** He clarifies that while reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob, it is ultimately superseded by the New Covenant, whose sign is baptism, just as circumcision was for the Abrahamic and the Sabbath for the Mosaic.

2. 26 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Niehaus, Biblical Theology, Session 6 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Biblical Theology - Niehaus).

Niehaus_BibTheo_Session06.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Niehaus, Biblical Theology, Session 6, Mosaic Covenant, Part 1

Briefing Document: The Abrahamic Covenant

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the key themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Jeffrey Niehaus in Session 5 of his Biblical Theology series, focusing on the Abrahamic Covenant. Niehaus meticulously examines the establishment, nature, and significance of this foundational covenant, distinguishing it from the Adamic and Noahic covenants and highlighting its anticipatory role in subsequent special grace covenants, particularly the Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Distinction from Common Grace Covenants:

- The Abrahamic Covenant marks the beginning of God's special grace program, building upon the common grace provided through the Adamic and Noahic covenants, which established the planet as a context for this special program.
- Niehaus emphasizes that Abraham was already a vassal of the Lord under the common grace covenants when God first spoke to him in Genesis 12. This established God's right to command and make promises.

2. Genesis 15:18 as the Covenant Cutting:

- A crucial point is Niehaus's assertion that the Abrahamic Covenant is not established in Genesis 12, despite the promises made there. He argues that the covenant is formally enacted in **Genesis 15:18**: *"On that day, the Lord cut a covenant with Abraham before he changed his name."*
- He uses the analogy of a trade treaty awaiting signature to illustrate that promises and plans do not constitute a covenant until it is formally "cut" or ratified.

3. Promises in Genesis 12 as Forward-Looking:

- The promises in Genesis 12 (great nation, blessing, great name, blessing to others, land) are presented as future-oriented and promissory, existing before the formal covenant.
- Niehaus highlights the imperative nature of "I will make you a blessing," suggesting that Abraham was intended to actively bless others as a recipient of

God's blessing. *"The Lord doesn't bless us so that we can be blessed and happy. He intends for us, shall we say, to share the wealth, to share the blessing. And that's what he's telling Abraham."*

- He connects the blessing of "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" to Paul's identification of this as the promise of the Spirit, fulfilled through faith in Christ, Abraham's seed.

4. Ratification Ceremony in Genesis 15:

- The cutting of the covenant in Genesis 15 involved Abraham preparing animals, and a *"flaming torch passed between those pieces."* Niehaus identifies this as a theophany, the Lord's visible manifestation.
- Drawing on form criticism and parallels with second-millennium treaty structures, he identifies elements like "I am Yahweh" as the title of the treaty (verse 7) and a historical prologue ("who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans").

5. Covenant as a Suzerain-Vassal Arrangement with a Conquest Mandate:

- Niehaus refutes the idea that the land promise was a pure "grant" (as proposed by Moshe Weinfeld). He argues that while it has grant-like aspects, it was more accurately a *"conquest mandate,"* where Abraham's descendants would need to conquer and possess the land. He finds parallels in ancient Near Eastern annals, such as those of Tukulti-Ninurta I.

6. Significance of the Lord Passing Between the Pieces:

- Contrasting with ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties where the vassal typically passed between the cut pieces (symbolizing the consequences of breaking the treaty), Niehaus emphasizes that it was the Lord who passed through in the theophany.
- He interprets this as a symbolic act where *"the Lord is symbolically saying, Abram, if there's covenant breaking by you or your offspring, I, the Lord, will take the punishment on myself."* He sees this as a crucial Christological aspect of the covenant, foreshadowing Christ taking the punishment for the sins of Abraham's offspring (believers).
- He cites Jeremiah 34 as an example of the symbolic meaning of this ceremony where those who broke their covenant faced a similar fate to the cut animals.

7. Reaffirmation in Genesis 17 and the Sign of Circumcision:

- Niehaus clarifies that Genesis 17 describes the reaffirmation or the putting into effect of the already established Abrahamic Covenant (from Genesis 15), marked by the institution of circumcision as its sign. *"I will confirm, or I will put into effect, or I will keep my covenant between us going."*
- He refutes the higher-critical view of two separate Abrahamic covenants (J/E in Genesis 15 and Priestly in Genesis 17) and also disagrees with T. Desmond Alexander's view of Genesis 15 as unconditional and Genesis 17 as conditional.
- He argues that the Bible consistently refers to one Abrahamic Covenant, reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob. He cites Paul in Romans 4, who states that circumcision is the sign of Abraham's faith, which was evident when the covenant was cut in Genesis 15.
- He notes a pattern in God's covenants: cutting the covenant, giving a sign (Sabbath for Mosaic, Baptism for New), and then further instructions.

8. Covenant Idioms and Reaffirmation:

- Niehaus mentions his own research on covenant idioms, arguing that except for the Noahic covenant, these idioms in the Bible are primarily used for the reaffirmation or putting into effect of existing covenants, not for making new ones.

9. Promises of Offspring, Land, and Royal Lineage:

- The reaffirmation in Genesis 17 includes key promises: numerous offspring, land, and royal offspring. The covenant is designated as "everlasting," though Niehaus clarifies this in terms of its long-lasting impact and eventual fulfillment in the New Covenant, not as a perpetually functioning covenant with the sign of circumcision.

10. Genesis 22 and the Sacrifice of Isaac:

- The account in Genesis 22, where Abraham is commanded to sacrifice Isaac, is seen as a powerful demonstration of Abraham's faith, which the Lord acknowledges with a reaffirmation of the earlier promises.
- Niehaus notes the Christological typology of this event: the father offering his son and the provision of a substitute sacrifice (the ram). He suggests this placed Abraham in a unique position mirroring the Father's sacrifice of Jesus.

11. "Jehovah-Jireh" and the Temple:

- Niehaus clarifies that "Jehovah-Jireh" (Yahweh-Yireh) is a place name, meaning "The Lord will provide" or literally "The Lord will see," not a divine name.
- He proposes an alternative translation of the saying, *"On the mountain of the Lord, one will see the Lord,"* connecting it to the later appearance of the Lord to David on Mount Moriah, where Solomon built the temple (2 Chronicles 3:1). This links the place of Abraham's near-sacrifice to the future site of worship.

12. Abraham as a Prophet and the Paradigm of God's Work:

- Niehaus highlights Genesis 20:7, which identifies Abraham as a prophet (the first use of the term in the Bible), supported by Psalm 105:15.
- He outlines a paradigm of God's work through Abraham: working by his Spirit through a prophet, warring against foes, establishing a covenant, and God remembering that covenant for future deliverance.

13. The Abrahamic Covenant and Subsequent Covenants:

- Niehaus emphasizes that the Abrahamic Covenant implies the later Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants, which he terms the "covenants of the promise."
- **Mosaic Covenant:** The promise of numerous offspring, liberation from bondage, and the land are seen as preconditions or fulfilled aspects leading to and under the Mosaic Covenant. However, the Mosaic Covenant is a distinct covenant with different terms, conditions, and its own sign (the Sabbath), not a renewal of the Abrahamic.
- **Davidic Covenant:** The promise of kings coming from Abraham (Genesis 17) is seen as an implication leading to the Davidic Covenant.
- **New Covenant:** The Abrahamic Covenant prefigures the New Covenant. The change in covenant signs (circumcision to baptism) indicates the New Covenant supersedes both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Hebrews highlights the superiority of the New Covenant founded on "better promises," namely those inherent in the Abrahamic.

14. Law and Promise (Galatians):

- Drawing from Paul's writings in Galatians, Niehaus underscores the distinction between the Abrahamic Covenant (the promise) and the Law (the Mosaic Covenant), which came 430 years later. The Law did not nullify the prior

Abrahamic Covenant and its promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's seed (Christ).

- The Law served as a "pedagogue" to reveal humanity's inability to fulfill God's standards and their need for Christ. The Abrahamic Covenant, however, is the vehicle through which the promise of the Spirit is received by faith.

15. Abraham's Foresight:

- John 8:56 is cited to show that Abraham had a significant understanding of Christ's future coming: *"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad."*

Conclusion:

Dr. Niehaus presents the Abrahamic Covenant as a foundational and pivotal point in God's redemptive plan. It is a distinct act of God's special grace, formally established in Genesis 15, reaffirmed in Genesis 17 with the sign of circumcision, and continually remembered by God as the basis for future deliverance. The promises inherent in this covenant anticipate and are fulfilled in the subsequent Mosaic, Davidic, and ultimately the New Covenant centered in Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham through whom all nations are blessed. The sign of the covenant evolves, signifying the progression and supersession of God's covenantal administration.

4. Study Guide: Niehaus, Biblical Theology, Session 6, Mosaic Covenant, Part 1

The Abrahamic Covenant: A Study Guide

Quiz:

1. According to Niehaus, at what specific point in Genesis is the Abrahamic Covenant formally established, and what is the significance of the action taken at that time?
2. What are some of the key promises God makes to Abraham in Genesis 12 before the formal covenant, and how does Niehaus explain the significance of the imperative "be a blessing"?
3. Explain the ancient Near Eastern treaty parallel used by Niehaus to illustrate the covenant ratification in Genesis 15. What is the significance of the "flaming torch" passing between the cut animals?
4. What is Niehaus's critique of the "covenant of grant" theory in relation to the Abrahamic Covenant, and what does he propose instead regarding the land promise?
5. Describe the symbolic meaning Niehaus attributes to the Lord passing between the pieces of the sacrificed animals in Genesis 15. How does he connect this to the offspring of Abraham?
6. According to Niehaus, what is the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15 and its reaffirmation (or putting into effect) in Genesis 17, particularly concerning circumcision?
7. Summarize Niehaus's argument against the idea that there were two distinct Abrahamic covenants (one unconditional and one conditional). What New Testament passage does he cite to support his view?
8. How does Niehaus interpret the event in Genesis 22 where Abraham is commanded to sacrifice Isaac? What does he say about the place name "Jehovah-Jireh"?
9. Identify three other covenants that Niehaus argues are implied or foreshadowed within the Abrahamic Covenant, and briefly explain the connection for one of them.

10. What distinction does Paul make in Galatians regarding the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Law, and what is the enduring significance of the Abrahamic Covenant according to Niehaus?

Answer Key:

1. The Abrahamic Covenant is formally established in Genesis 15:18. The significance of this moment is that "the Lord cut a covenant with Abraham," an action that Niehaus compares to the signing and enacting of a treaty between nations, making the promises legally binding.
2. Key promises in Genesis 12 include making Abraham into a great nation, blessing him, making his name great, and blessing those who bless him while cursing those who curse him; all peoples on earth will be blessed through him. Niehaus explains that "be a blessing" (an imperative in Hebrew) means Abraham, having been blessed, is intended to share that blessing with others.
3. Niehaus uses the parallel of a trade treaty where promises and plans are laid out but are not in effect until the treaty is "cut" or signed. The "flaming torch" (theophany of the Lord) passing between the pieces symbolizes the Lord taking upon himself the consequences of covenant breaking by Abraham's offspring.
4. Niehaus critiques the "covenant of grant" theory, which suggests an unconditional gift of land, by pointing out that Abram's descendants had to conquer and work the land, making it more of a "conquest mandate" within a suzerain-vassal arrangement rather than an outright grant.
5. Niehaus understands the Lord passing between the animal pieces as a symbolic act where the Lord is promising to take the punishment upon himself if Abraham or his offspring break the covenant. He connects this to the fact that believers are the offspring of Abraham by faith.
6. Niehaus argues that there is only one Abrahamic Covenant, established in Genesis 15. Genesis 17 is the point where the Lord "puts it into effect" or "confirms" the existing covenant, with circumcision being given as the sign of this already established covenant.
7. Niehaus argues against two Abrahamic covenants by stating the Bible never mentions more than one and refers to the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as singular. He cites Romans 4, where Paul presents circumcision as a sign of Abraham's faith, which he demonstrated in Genesis 15 when the single Abrahamic Covenant was cut.

8. Niehaus interprets the event in Genesis 22 as a demonstration of Abraham's faith and highlights the Christological foreshadowing in the father offering his son and the provision of a substitute sacrifice. He clarifies that "Jehovah-Jireh" (the Lord will provide) is a place name given by Abraham to the location, not a divine name itself.
9. Three covenants implied in the Abrahamic are the Mosaic (through the promise of numerous offspring and the Exodus), the Davidic (through the promise of royal offspring), and the New Covenant (foreshadowed in the oath passage and the offering of the only son). The connection to the Mosaic Covenant is seen in the fulfillment of the promise of numerous descendants as a precondition for the formation of the nation of Israel at Sinai.
10. Paul distinguishes between the Abrahamic Covenant (the promise, established earlier) and the Mosaic Law (introduced 430 years later), stating that the law did not nullify the pre-existing covenantal promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's seed (Christ). The Abrahamic Covenant, with its promise of the Spirit, remains the foundational covenant through which this blessing ultimately comes in the New Covenant.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Discuss the significance of understanding the historical and literary context of the ancient Near East in interpreting the Abrahamic Covenant, particularly in relation to treaty structures and the concept of a "grant."
2. Analyze the progression of the Abrahamic Covenant as presented in Genesis 12, 15, 17, and 22, paying close attention to the relationship between promise, covenant ratification, the sign of the covenant, and the ultimate demonstration of Abraham's faith.
3. Evaluate Niehaus's argument for the singularity of the Abrahamic Covenant against the view that posits distinct unconditional and conditional covenants with Abraham. What are the strengths and weaknesses of his interpretation?
4. Explore the ways in which the Abrahamic Covenant lays the groundwork for subsequent covenants in the Old Testament (Mosaic and Davidic) and ultimately finds its fulfillment and supersession in the New Covenant.
5. Examine the Christological dimensions of the Abrahamic Covenant narrative, focusing on the symbolic significance of the covenant ratification ceremony in Genesis 15 and the near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22.

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Common Grace Covenantal Package (Adamic and Noahic):** The foundational covenants God made with humanity as a whole, providing a stable world and establishing principles of governance and morality applicable to all.
- **Suzerain-Vassal Arrangement:** A hierarchical relationship in ancient Near Eastern treaties where a greater king (suzerain) makes a covenant with a lesser king or people (vassal), outlining obligations and protections.
- **Theophany:** A visible manifestation of God to humanity, often in dramatic or symbolic forms (e.g., the flaming torch).
- **Form Criticism:** A method of biblical study that analyzes the literary genres and structures of biblical texts to understand their original context and purpose.
- **Historical Prologue:** A common element in ancient Near Eastern treaties that recounts the history of the relationship between the suzerain and vassal, often highlighting the suzerain's past acts of favor.
- **Covenant Ratification:** The formal ceremony or act that seals and puts a covenant into effect, making it legally binding.
- **Typology:** The study of how Old Testament people, events, and institutions foreshadow or prefigure New Testament realities, particularly the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- **Synecdoche:** A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole, or the whole to represent a part (e.g., using "oath" to refer to the entire covenant).
- **Reaffirmation (of Covenant):** A restatement or confirmation of an existing covenant with the same parties or their descendants, often emphasizing its continued validity.
- **Covenant Renewal:** A formal process of restating and recommitting to an existing covenant, often with adjustments for new circumstances or generations.
- **Pedagogue:** A tutor or guide, often used by Paul to describe the role of the Law in leading people to Christ.
- **Covenants of the Promise:** A Pauline phrase, likely referring to the Abrahamic Covenant and the subsequent covenants that unfold from its initial promises of land, offspring, and blessing.

5. FAQs on Niehaus, Biblical Theology, Session 6, Mosaic Covenant, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Abrahamic Covenant

1. What is the significance of the Abrahamic Covenant within the broader narrative of Biblical Theology? The Abrahamic Covenant marks the beginning of God's special grace program after the common grace established through the Adamic and Noahic covenants. It serves as the foundation upon which subsequent special grace covenants, such as the Mosaic and Davidic, are anticipated and built. It promises blessings, a great nation, a great name for Abraham, and ultimately that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him. This blessing is later understood by Paul to be the promise of the Spirit received through faith in Christ, Abraham's offspring.

2. When and how was the Abrahamic Covenant formally established? While God initially made promises to Abraham in Genesis 12, the formal establishment of the covenant occurred in Genesis 15:18. This is explicitly stated: "On that day the Lord cut a covenant with Abraham." The act of "cutting" a covenant was a solemn ratification ceremony, similar to a treaty between nations. In this instance, it involved a theophany where a flaming torch, representing God, passed between the cut-up pieces of animals, signifying God's commitment to the covenant.

3. What were the key promises given to Abraham in the covenant? The Abrahamic Covenant included several key promises: the promise of numerous offspring who would become a great nation, the promise of blessing for Abraham and through him to all peoples, the promise of a great name for Abraham, and the promise of land for his offspring. Importantly, the blessing to all nations is fulfilled through faith in Abraham's seed, Christ, bringing forgiveness, salvation, and the Holy Spirit.

4. How does the concept of a "grant" relate to the promise of land in the Abrahamic Covenant? Some scholars have viewed the promise of land as a pure "grant" with no obligations. However, a closer examination reveals it to be more of a "conquest mandate." While God grants the land to Abraham's descendants, they are required to go in, conquer it, work it, and fight for it. This is analogous to ancient Near Eastern conquest mandates where a ruler would grant territories to be conquered.

5. What is the theological significance of God passing between the cut-up animals in the covenant ceremony of Genesis 15? In ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties, it was typically the vassal who would pass between the cut-up animals, symbolically signifying that if they broke the treaty, they would suffer a similar fate. However, in the Abrahamic Covenant ceremony, it is the Lord, in the form of a flaming torch, who passes between the pieces. This is interpreted as God symbolically taking upon himself the punishment for any covenant breaking by Abraham's offspring, a foreshadowing of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

6. How is the Abrahamic Covenant reaffirmed or put into effect in subsequent passages, and what is the role of circumcision? The Abrahamic Covenant is reaffirmed and put into effect in Genesis 17, where God states, "I will confirm my covenant between us going." Circumcision is introduced at this point as the sign of this already established covenant. It signifies membership in the Abrahamic Covenant. While the covenant is reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob, these are better understood as reaffirmations of the existing covenant rather than new or renewed covenants.

7. How does the New Testament understanding of faith relate to the Abrahamic Covenant, and who are considered the true children of Abraham? The New Testament, particularly in Romans 4, emphasizes that Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised. Circumcision is presented as a sign of the righteousness he had by faith. Paul identifies the "seed" of Abraham through whom all nations are blessed as Christ. Therefore, those who have faith in Christ are considered the true children of Abraham and heirs according to the promise.

8. How does the Abrahamic Covenant relate to and differ from the Mosaic and New Covenants? The Abrahamic Covenant lays the groundwork for both the Mosaic and New Covenants. The promise of numerous offspring and deliverance from bondage in the Abrahamic Covenant are preconditions for the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant with the nation of Israel. The Davidic Covenant, promising kings, is also implied in the Abrahamic. However, the Mosaic Covenant is a distinct covenant with different laws, conditions, and a different sign (the Sabbath). The New Covenant, signified by baptism, supersedes both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. It fulfills the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, particularly the blessing of the Spirit, and is founded on better promises, offering a new way of relating to God through faith in Christ's sacrifice.