

Familial Covenants:
A Biblical-Theological Analysis of Familial Language
within the Covenants of Genesis 17 and 2 Samuel 7

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Introduction

One of the key themes in any understanding of the Bible is that of covenant, and one of the key themes in any understanding of society is family. Yet, too often, the Scriptures and covenants – the cornerstones of ancient Israel’s societal self-understanding – are not interpreted with the family in view. In this paper, I aim to demonstrate that these themes are intricately wedded in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Specific attention will be given to Genesis 17 and 2 Samuel 7. The underlying hope is that, if these themes can be conjoined in two of the highest peaks of Old Testament theology – the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants – then future research can be explored in more minute areas of the biblical text.

Before exploring the respective passages for biblical-theological insights, it is necessary to clear unwanted brush and pave a trail of common understanding. To do this, two points must be made: one about modern individualism versus ancient corporate reality, and one about the nature of covenants for biblical revelation and Israelite religion.

In the ancient near east, corporate identity and solidarity was pervasive.¹ In the words of Gordon Wenham, “You were who you were because of the family you were born into,” and each family was patrilineal, meaning the descent of the family was traced through the father’s line.² Behind this, “there is the idea that somehow, within the

¹ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 138.

² Gordon J. Wenham, “Family in the Pentateuch” in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, edited by Richard S. Hess and M.

very body of the ancestor, the future generations already existed.”³ This notion of corporate personality transcends time; an individual is part of the larger family in the present, in the past, and in the future. To belong to the family is, in one sense, to have one’s entire family history recapitulated in the present, and in another sense, to be pregnant with the family’s entire future.⁴ Thus, when modern readers approach the text of the biblical world, the familial dynamics can be easy to miss and hard to understand. Nevertheless, the concept of ancestry/family/lineage lies within the foundations of the biblical world and the text itself. Its importance for modern readers cannot be overstated. To truly understand the message of the Bible, one must firmly grasp who the family is to which the message belongs, and what that message means for the family community.

The second foundational point relates to the notion of covenant. Simply put, any attempt to understand the major flow of the Bible without underscoring the covenants would be insufficient. The covenants are the means whereby God establishes the formal rubric for the organic center of the entire Bible: his relations with mankind. In the words of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, “The covenant is the primary metaphor for understanding Israel’s life with God. It is the covenant which offers to Israel the gift of hope, the reality of identity, the possibility of belonging, the certitude of vocation.”⁵

While it is imperative to grasp the importance of covenants for biblical revelation, it is just as important to grasp the depth of what happens within a covenantal relationship. The covenants are rarely ever *merely* transactional in the ancient Near East or the Bible. Rather, a

Daniel Carroll R., 17–31 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 20–21. See also Daniel I. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, edited by Ken M. Campbell, 33–102 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 40.

³ Joseph Atkinson, “Roots of the Christian Family in the Old Testament: Corporate Personality” in *Liberty, Life and Family* 4, no. 1 (1999): 68.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 154. This point is also summed up well in the first chapter of Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 21–38.

covenant is a *personal* pledge or oath, establishing a relationship between two parties. Most often, the personal relationship established is familial:

The idea, 'I am yours, you are mine' underlies every covenant declaration. This implies a quasi-familial bond which makes sons and brothers. The act of accepting the other as one's own reflects the basic idea of covenant: an attempt to extend the bond of blood beyond the kinship sphere, or, in other words, to make partner one's own flesh and blood.⁶

This intrinsic bond – between the motifs of covenant and family – opens the doors for further research beyond the scope of this paper. The aim of this paper is rather brief, demonstrating the familial covenant theme in just two key passages – Genesis 17 and 2 Samuel 7. But of course, much more could be said from a larger scope, be it from the Old Testament, the entire Bible, or from systematics. Nevertheless, with a better understanding of family solidarity and covenantal relationships in the religious life of Israel, the path is now cleared to see how these themes combine in God's covenants to Abraham and David.

Analysis of Genesis 17

To rightly comprehend the familial emphasis in Genesis 17, one must be familiar with the literary context surrounding the chapter. From the moment God extends his threefold promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 – to make him into a great nation, to make his name great, and to bless all the families of the earth through him – the narrative builds to the conception and birth of the promised seed, Isaac, in both positive and negative ways. In fact, immediately before chapter 17, Abram and Sarai manipulate the situation and attempt to have a proxy-heir through Sarai's bondservant, Hagar. Though a son is born to Abram, Ishmael, it becomes clear in Genesis 17 that this was not God's design and will not be the chosen seed through whom the promise will come to fruition.

⁶ Paul Kalluvveetil C.M.I., *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1982), 212 quoted in Gordon Paul Hugenberger, *Marriage as Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 179.

Given this preceding context, an easily overlooked but important fact should be pointed out from the text. In verse one of chapter 17, the reader is told that chapter 17 is taking place when Abram is 99 years old, which is 13 years after Ishmael's birth, when Abram was 86. Many commentators call attention to Abram here, noting his old age and his extended waiting period for the promised seed through Sarai. However, the writer is also subtly making a different point about Ishmael. The boy is now 13 years old, which is close to marrying age (and thus reproductive age) for an ancient Israelite son.⁷ The import of this subtle detail is that Genesis 17 comes in the wake of an impending faith-moment for Abram. To whom will he look for an heir? His current son in the flesh, or the long-awaited promised son who still has not come? It is in light of this tension that God appears for the first time in the canon as *El Shaddai* (Gen. 17:1). Of course, this name is often interpreted "God Almighty," but in the context, it is more appropriate to render, "God who is sufficient," stressing God's ability to deliver on his promise.⁸ In the first pericope of chapter 18 immediately following our passage, this emphasis continues as the promised one, Isaac, is foretold by the three visitors to Abraham's tent (Gen. 18:1-15).

Another important point of context is that in Genesis 15, God clearly 'cuts a covenant' with Abram (Gen. 15:18); a smoking pot and flaming torch representing his presence pass through halved animals while Abram is put into a deep sleep. This is the first instance of a covenant being struck between God and Abram following the *promises* given in Genesis 12. The question, then, is how does chapter 17 fit into the picture? Is chapter 17 a new covenant, or is it a recapitulated enhancement of the first? One's answer to this question is likely to inform one's view of chapter 22, where another covenant event seems to take place after Abraham offers Isaac on Mount Moriah.

Scholars differ on the relationships here, but Gentry and Wellum convincingly argue that the covenant scenes, particularly in chapters 15 and 17, portray one essential covenant with Abraham that is *established* in chapter 15, then *confirmed* by God in chapter 17.⁹ This conclusion is

⁷ Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 57n113.

⁸ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Commentary Series, (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), 128.

⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 266-268.

derived after analyzing the use of the verbs *heqim*, *natan*, and *karat* before the object *berit* within the book of Genesis. In both the flood narrative (Gen. 6-9), and chapter 17, the terms *heqim berit* and *natan berit* are used numerous times, while the term *karat berit*, the more standard language for making an initial covenant, is never used. It can then be deduced that (a) since the flood narrative (Genesis 6-9) is a confirmation of the creation covenant (Genesis 1-3), and (b) since the flood narrative and Genesis 17 share the same lexicon for their respective covenants, then (c) Genesis 17 can be seen as a confirmation of the earlier covenant that was cut (*karat berit*) in Genesis 15:18. The point here is that the two chapters, Genesis 15 and 17, are meant to be read together and in light of one another. Of course, each has respective emphases, but what is true about one is complementary of the other.¹⁰

Upon first reading of Genesis 17, it is hardly possible to ignore the family dimensions throughout the chapter. A simple count of the familial references and allusions is astounding. In just 21 verses, there are 19 familial references and another 23 familial allusions:

Familial References

'father' (4, 5)

'your offspring after you,' (7, 7, 8, 9, 10)

'throughout their generations' (7, 9)

'every male throughout your generations' (12)

'he who is born in your house' (13)

'Sarai your wife' (15)

'Sarah your wife' (19)

'a son' (16, 19)

'a child' (17, 17)

'his offspring after him' (19)

'father twelve princes' (20)

¹⁰ Given this point and the lopsided blessings from God to Abraham throughout Genesis 15, 17, and 22, I would hold that these passages, taken together, should be considered a grant-type covenant; see Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University, 2009), 101. For a helpful description and comparison of the different types of covenants, see Hahn's summary on pages 28-31.

Familial Allusions

'Abraham,' i.e. 'father of a multitude' (5, 9, 15, 17, 18)

'Sarah,' i.e. 'princess' (15, 17, 19, 21)¹¹

'Ishmael,' i.e. illegitimate son (18, 20)

'Isaac,' i.e. legitimate son (19, 21)

'multiply you greatly,' i.e. Abraham's reproduction (2)

'make you exceedingly fruitful,' i.e. Abraham's reproduction (6)

'make you into nations,' i.e. Abraham's reproduction (6)

'kings shall come from you,' i.e. Abraham's reproduction (6)

'every male among you,' i.e. Abraham's descendants (10)

'she shall become nations,' i.e. Sarah's reproduction (16)

'kings of peoples shall come from her,' i.e. Sarah's reproduction

'make him fruitful' i.e. Ishmael's reproduction (20)

'multiply him greatly' i.e. Ishmael's reproduction (20)

'make him into a great nation' i.e. Ishmael's reproduction (20)

These 42 family-related words or phrases punctuate the importance of understanding Abraham's covenant in familial terms.

Nevertheless, as one continues to read the passage, the initial dominance of the quantity of references gives way to the prioritization of key familial aspects. To begin with, Scott Hahn argues that the entire covenant in Genesis 17 is intended to be a fulfillment of God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12:2c to give him a "great name." He gives six reasons. First, the term, "your name" is not repeated after 12:2c until Genesis 17:5. Second, Abram and Sarai receive new names in Genesis 17. Third, Abram's new name, Abraham, is longer, and thus "greater" than his first. Fourth, a "great name" is associated with royalty in the Bible, and it is said in Genesis 17:6 that "kings shall come from you." Fifth, because Abraham is promised to be the father of multiple *nations* (not merely kings), this would contribute to him achieving a "great name." And sixth, Genesis 17 limits the inheritance of the land to Isaac and his descendants, thus accenting the "great name" of chosen descendants,

¹¹ Bruce Waltke notes, "Both Sarai and Sarah are probably dialectical variants meaning 'princess.' The promise that she will bear kings supports this interpretation. Sarai, her birth-name, probably looks back on her noble descent, whereas Sarah, her covenantal name, looks ahead to her noble descendants." See Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001), 262.

whereas in Genesis 15 the land promise seems to be for any “offspring” (Gen. 15:19).¹² For Hahn, these six points show that God is giving Abraham a “great name,” that is, a royal family dynasty by which Abraham will be the “father of many nations.” In other words, this emphasis on Abraham receiving a great name aligns with the continuation and propagation of his family’s progeny and prosperity.

Additionally, Kenneth Mathews draws attention to three new elements found in Genesis 17 compared to the covenant establishment in chapter 15: the perpetuity of the covenant (vv. 7,8,13,19), the sign of circumcision (vs. 11), and new names for Abraham and Sarah.¹³ Given the keen focus on God’s intention to make good on his promises, anything new in the accounts of the covenants becomes particularly important. For, as God makes bigger promises, he is bound to deliver in bigger ways. As such, the three alterations acknowledged by Mathews are veering points in the story. It is immensely important, then, to notice that all three alterations contain familial changes, familial promises, or familial significance.

The first alteration noticed by Mathews is the perpetuity of the covenant. The everlasting nature of the covenant in Genesis 17:7 is only so because it pertains to “your offspring after you throughout their generations.” The eternality of the covenant, in this rendering, is only possible through sons and heirs. Moreover, that this is God’s first direct covenant with Abraham’s offspring is significant.¹⁴ The second element of newness noted by Mathews is the sign of circumcision. It is not unintentional that this sign is directed to the organ of procreation.¹⁵ Rather, this goes to show that the theme of the covenant revolves around the issue of family lineage and procreation. Additionally, the covenant sign of circumcision is not merely negative, signifying the removal (or “cutting off”) of the person who fails to maintain the covenant (though it certainly does mean this). It is also a positive sign, not for the *public*, but for *select family members* – the individual, the parents, and the

¹² Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 105-107.

¹³ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 193.

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 22.

¹⁵ Waltke, *Genesis*, 264.

(future) wife.¹⁶ Circumcision positively associates the boy/man as a covenant member of Abraham's line and God's blessing to these select family members. Mathews' final element of newness in Genesis 17 is the renaming of Abram and Sarai. The new names, Abraham and Sarah, both imply a multitude of nations and royalty in the future. These new names accentuate the central theme of the passage, the promise of many descendants, or as argued previously, a "great name."¹⁷ This is the primary carrier theme that incorporates the idea of family into the passage.

While the theme of 'family' can clearly be seen in the number of references, the centrality of God giving Abraham a "great name" through a multitude of descendants, and through the new aspects of the Abrahamic covenant compared to Genesis 12-16, it remains to be seen how this familial theme plays out in God's covenant with David, and how the two relate to each other. To appropriately answer this question, we will analyze 2 Samuel 7, then make concluding remarks at the end of the paper.

Analysis of 2 Samuel 7

The first thing to be said about 2 Samuel 7 is that it does not explicitly call itself a covenant, yet, other parallel passages in Scripture do consider it to be one (2 Sam. 23:5, Jer. 33:21, Ps. 89, Ps. 132:12, 2 Chron. 13:5).¹⁸ Thus, its status as a covenant is not questioned by scholars, but *what kind of covenant* is much debated. Some authors argue that the Davidic covenant contains elements that are similar to a suzerain-vassal treaty, but the majority of scholars in the last thirty years assert that it is a royal-grant covenant, in which a superior king carries the bulk of the obligations for the benefit of the other inferior party.¹⁹ Scholars arguing that the covenant is a suzerain-vassal treaty do so in large part because of the stipulations for discipline in verses 14-15. It is claimed that such conditional disciplinary measures could not exist in the royal-grant

¹⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 273.

¹⁷ Also, Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 20: "The promise of a multitude of descendants is the key theme to this chapter."

¹⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 392-393.

¹⁹ For an overview of scholars on each side, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 397n18.

model which is the most unconditional of all covenant types. However, the view adopted here follows Scott Hahn, who argues that the key to understanding the complexity of the matter is understanding the text's Sonship language: "The threat of punishment comes precisely because of [unconditional] divine Sonship, not in spite of it."²⁰ It is a true son who may be disciplined and so lose the full exercise of his privileges (conditional element), but he can never again lose the status of Sonship or the love of his father (unconditional element).

In regards to the context surrounding 2 Samuel 7, the themes of a barren wife and an heirless father reign supreme again. David's wife, Michal, dies childless in the verse immediately preceding 2 Samuel 7, and David is left with no heir-apparent for his throne. Immediately following the chapter, "the succeeding narrative blazes a sordid trail of sin and internecine fighting within the Davidic house."²¹ Just as with Genesis 17, the whisper of the narrative asks, "Where is the son of promise?" For this reason, this portion of the narrative is well known as "The Succession Narrative," punctuating the family theme even before the passage begins.²²

Again, it is helpful to evaluate the number of times a family reference or allusion is cited in the 29 verses of 2 Samuel 7. While there are certainly not as many as were found in Genesis 17, a total of 23 words or phrases show that the theme of family is still highly prominent in the Davidic covenant:

References

'great name' (9)

'house' (11, 15, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 29, 29)

'your fathers' (12)

'your offspring after you' (12)

'his kingdom,' i.e. son's kingdom (12, 13)

'he,' 'him,' i.e. pronouns referring to the promised son (13, 14, 14, 14, 14, 15)

'I will be to him a father' (14)

²⁰ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 198.

²¹ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 143.

²² Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 142n12.

'he shall be to me a son' (14)

Allusions

'who shall come from your body,' i.e. David's seed (12)

These references underline two key motifs: David's "house," and the multiple layers of father-son relations at play. These familial words are the electric current in the conduit of the Davidic covenant.

The central word of the entire chapter is the word *bayit*, or "house." This word can mean a literal dwelling, a temple or a dynasty.²³ In the words of David Firth, "It is the interplay between these senses that drives the narrative as the focus shifts from David's desire to build Yahweh a house through to Yahweh's promise that he will build David a house, a lasting dynasty."²⁴ Of particular note for our purposes, this word serves as a catch-all in ancient Israel to describe the corporate solidarity of a family unit.²⁵ If one wanted to speak of the incorporated family of a father – past, present, and future – they would use the word *bayit*. As such, the driving point of this passage is that David's royal family – his *bayit* – will be established by God himself.

This last point is of supreme importance. In one sense, it is misleading to refer to this as the "Davidic covenant." The primary substance of God's oath comes in verses 11b-16, with 11b – God's promise to make David a "house" – serving as the crescendo.²⁶ Yet, David is not the beneficiary in verses 11b-16. The promises are made to David's offspring.²⁷ Whereas the Abrahamic promise was made "to you and your offspring," naming both the patriarch and his sons, these Davidic promises are given solely "to your offspring after you" following the days when "you lie down with your fathers." In other words, there is no way to describe the Davidic covenant apart from family terminology; the promises are for David's family. And yet, the promise for David's offspring is viewed as a covenant with David himself. In verse 16, even though David's son's kingdom and

²³ David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 382.

²⁴ Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 382.

²⁵ Atkinson, "Roots of the Christian Family in the Old Testament," 75.

²⁶ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 182.

²⁷ See Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 157-158.

throne will be established forever, God still says to David through Nathan, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever.” This stands to reason because in the ancient Near East, for a son to sit on his father’s throne (continuing the dynasty), to fulfill his mission (in this case, building a temple), and to continue in covenant with his father’s God (“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”) is to give the patriarch an honorable and “great name.”²⁸ Indeed, “a man’s name was perpetuated in his progeny.”²⁹

The final point to be made about 2 Samuel 7 is that within the center of Nathan’s oracle, in verses 11b-16, a chiasm exists. At the center of the chiasm stands the father-son relationship between God and his covenant partner, David’s son.³⁰ This filial relationship is monumental. Until this point in the Old Testament, God has only been known as a father to Israel corporately (Exod. 4:22, Deut. 32:6), but never to an individual singularly. It is no wonder that one author calls this segment “the ideological summit of ‘Deuteronomistic History’ but also of the OT as a whole.”³¹ More pointedly for our purposes, this statement in verse 14 is the perfect marriage of the family and covenant themes. The covenantal formula – I am yours and you are mine – is now wrapped into one of the most sacred familial bonds possible, that of father and son. If there was any doubt that the two themes of family and covenant were meant to be understood together, this statement from God shatters it. This verse demands reinterpretation of God’s relationship with his creatures. Many notions of the Davidic king’s divine sonship have been construed.³² A.A. Anderson is correct, however, in stating that the divine sonship portrayed here consists of three overlapping concepts: adoption, covenant, and royal grant.³³ Legal and literal sonship could be derived from each of these structures, and all three are present in this text.

²⁸ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 182.

²⁹ P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 203.

³⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 394.

³¹ David R. Tasker, *Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Hebrew Scriptures About the Fatherhood of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 93.

³² For a summary, see Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 194.

³³ A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 122.

In sum, the significance of the elements of David's covenant may be found not only in the *number* of familial references in the passage, but more importantly, in the *centrality* of the familial language for understanding the message. The covenant is primarily about David receiving a "great name" through a "house" or royal dynasty. This house will be established as a son of David will sit on the throne eternally. This son will be called a son of God and will live in a harmonious covenant relationship with him. These themes – a house, a Davidic son, and a divine son – intertwine the themes of family and covenant in 2 Samuel 7.

Concluding Observations

Our first observation concerns the relationship between the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants – to each other and to the other biblical covenants. The similarities between Abraham and David are striking. Both covenants are set in the context of illegitimate sons and a barren wife. Both covenants are soon followed by the birth of the promised son. Both covenants are extended to future generations, namely through the promised seed who is yet unborn.³⁴ Both covenants are eternal and secure a kingly lineage through their offspring. Both covenants discuss the possibility of disobedience from the sons. Both covenants apply the covenant formula (I am yours and you are mine) to future generations. Both covenants secure a great name for the recipient. And both covenants borrow from other covenantal themes in biblical revelation, both building and narrowing at the same time.³⁵

The second observation picks up where the first left off. The clear trend of the covenants, even as displayed in Genesis 17 and 2 Samuel 7, is one of expansion and simultaneous contraction. God's initial covenant is established with Adam and recapitulated with Noah. Then he narrows the blessings to the family of Abraham. Then Abraham's family is narrowed exclusively for Isaac. This trend continues through Jacob and Judah's lines until David arrives.³⁶ In David's covenant, the same occurs.

³⁴ Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 385.

³⁵ For more on these connections, see Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 143; Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 196; and Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 389.

³⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 203.

David's covenant benefits the promised son after him, Solomon, and his line. This theme, of course, works itself throughout the rest of the Bible, but it is necessary to note here that it happens through family covenants. Without the covenants, and without the families of those covenants, this narrowing of the line of promise does not exist. Nor, in fact, does the expansion of the promise. Just as the line is narrowed in some ways, in other ways the magnitude of the promises is elevated and expanded. What starts as descendants for Abraham becomes nations, then a multitude of nations, then kings. Then with David, the promise of a kingdom is expanded to be eternal, and the natural filial relationship is extended beyond the biological to the theological. These themes – of narrowing and expanding – happen primarily through the familial language of the covenants.

The third and final point is rather blunt: the family language in biblical covenants is dizzyingly complicated. One must sift through multiple kinds of familial ties. From merely the two passages evaluated here, 17 different kinds of familial bonds surface:

- Patriarch and matriarch (Abraham and Sarah)
- Patriarch and legitimate son (Abraham and Isaac; David and Solomon)
- Patriarch and illegitimate son (Abraham and Ishmael)
- Patriarch and other legitimate biological sons (circumcision mandate)
- Patriarch and non-biological members of household (circumcision mandate)
- Patriarch and distant sons (Abraham and 'your offspring after you throughout their generations')
- Patriarch and king-sons (Abraham and kings)
- Patriarch and nation-sons (Abraham and multitude of nations)
- Patriarch and fathers (David and his fathers)
- Matriarch and legitimate son (Sarah and Isaac)
- Matriarch and illegitimate son (Sarah and Ishmael)
- Matriarch and king-sons (Sarah and kings of peoples)
- Matriarch and nation-sons (Sarah and nations)
- Legitimate son and sons (Isaac and offspring)
- Illegitimate son and sons (Ishmael and offspring)
- Illegitimate son and prince-sons (Ishmael and 12 princes)

God and patriarch's son (I shall be to him a father and he shall be to me a son)

Several other familial relationships exist in-between these descriptors – implied inferences (e.g. the brotherhood of Ishmael and Isaac), intertextual references, typological relationships, or theological relationships, but since they were not explicitly mentioned in the texts, they were not included here.

This means it is magnificently easy to misinterpret the familial bonds of the covenants, but direly important to get them right. Some of the most critical divides in church history and systematic theology derive from differing interpretations of the families of the covenants. In fact, covenantal-family issues trace all the way back to Paul (Rom. 2:12-29; Gal. 3), and even to Jesus. In one sense, it is a disagreement about the family of the covenant that got Jesus killed (Jn. 8:31-59; Mt. 22:41-46).

It has been the contention of this paper that a major theme in the biblical covenants is family. This wedding of family and covenant has been demonstrated within Genesis 17 and 2 Samuel 7. From these two landmark passages, one can see that the major movements of the Bible take place in and through a family. This is crucially important for understanding the narrative flow of the Bible and God's overall purposes for humanity. Indeed, to rightly understand God's heart for the world, one must reckon with familial themes and motifs in the Scriptures. This emphasis builds throughout the Old Testament, and comes to fruition in the New Testament with the birth of God's true son, Jesus Christ.