

Abram/Abraham as Prefiguration of the Covenant in the Torah

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Abstract:

A review of all 82 occurrences of the term *bārît*, “covenant,” in the Torah reveals a remarkable phenomenon: The few words (especially verbs) syntactically associated with *bārît* lead to certain thematic lines that all are connected to the figure of Abram/Abraham in some way or other. Hence, Abram/Abraham emerges as the prefiguration of the important concept of “covenant” in the Torah. (1) The first manifestation of “covenant,” the universal covenant with Noah and every living creature, uses almost the same wording and referenced items as the passage in which God establishes the covenant with Abraham. (2) The Hebrew Bible expresses the “making” of the covenant with the verb *KRT*, “to cut.” The occurrences form an ascending line beginning with Abram and continuing with the Israelites at Mount Horeb, then “all of us here alive today” in the land of Moab, and finally the future generations. (3) The eternal covenant (*bārît ʿōlām*) with every living creature finds a special expression in Abraham and the circumcision; it occurs again in the context of the Sabbath and the weekly renewed show-bread in the Tabernacle. (4) To “keep” (*ŠMR*) the covenant is another important verb. Abraham is the first figure summoned to keep the covenant, which later shall be kept by the people of Israel, while God, in turn, will keep the covenant with those who keep his commandments. Hence, “keeping (the covenant)” is an action of reciprocity between God and the people. (5) The antonym of keeping already appears in the context of Abraham: The uncircumcised male has “broken” (*PRR*) God’s covenant. Later, the Israelites break the covenant, whereas, God will never break his covenant. Hence, “breaking (the covenant)” only happens on the side of the human beings (no reciprocity). (6) God overcomes the problem of the broken covenant by “remembering” (*ZKR*) his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This enables God to start his work of salvation (the Exodus, the mercy after the Exile). (7) While the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy do not allow any covenant between Israel and the nations, Abraham and the other Patriarchs make covenants with other people. This detail underscores the important role of Abraham: Abraham opens the concept of covenant for “the other.” In sum, Abraham embodies the bridge between God’s particular covenant with Israel and God’s universal covenant with all humans and living creatures.

1 Introduction

A review of all 82 occurrences of the term *bərît*, “covenant,”¹ in the Torah reveals the preeminent role of Abram/Abraham as prefiguration of the covenant in the Torah. The verbs and substantives attached to *bərît* build a set of intertextual relationships that the reader can interpret in a literary and theological framework. Thus, the concept emerges from *within* the biblical text itself. This approach avoids the grafting of external theological categories onto the text and is thus similar to what Gerhard von Rad called “re-telling,” which “remains the most legitimate form of theological discourse on the Old Testament.”²

Hence, the following is a story told by the concordance – or, more precisely, bible software. It hardly emerges during a first reading, but rather, after a process of multiple re-readings. It presupposes a more or less finished “Torah,” and hence originated probably not before the Persian period.³ I will demonstrate how the major thematic lines – I focus on seven items – converge in the narrative figure of Abram/Abraham.⁴ A brief conclusion will summarize major aspects of the concept of *bərît* in the Torah.

¹ On the translation of this term in the ancient versions (Septuagint: *διαθήκη* [90%], Vulgate: *foedus* or *pactum*) and its disputed etymology, see Christoph Koch, Art. Covenant: Ancient Near East, Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, in: EBR 5, 2012, 812–908, 900.

² The entire quotation reads as follows: „But it would be fatal to our understanding of Israel’s witness if we were to arrange it from the outset on the basis of theological categories which, though current among ourselves, have absolutely nothing to do with those on whose basis Israel herself allowed her theological thinking to be ordered. Thus, re-telling remains the most legitimate form of theological discourse on the Old Testament.” Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Volume I: The History of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 121.

³ See, e.g., Koch, *Covenant*, 902–903.—On the development of the “Priestly Covenant” and its origin in the sixth century B.C.E., see Christophe Nihan, *The Priestly Covenant, Its Reinterpretations, and the Composition of “P,”* in: Sheckman, Sarah; Baden, Joel S. (ed.), *The Strata of the Priestly Writings. Contemporary Debate and Future Directions (AThANT 95)*, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2009, 87–134, 126–128.

⁴ On the role of Abraham in postexilic covenantal texts (Isa 63:7–64:11; Neh 9:6–37; Lev 26:1–46) see Richard J. Bautch, *An Appraisal of Abraham’s Role in Postexilic Covenants*, CBQ 71 (2009) 42–63. Bautch points out that in the period of the Second Temple some tradents appropriated Abraham (as it appears according to the following observations on the Torah) while others eschewed him.

2 Abram/Abraham as Prefiguration of the Covenant

2.1 The Same Wording for the Universal Covenant as for the Covenant with Abraham

Particular verbs or phrases associated with *bərît* indicate the major thematic lines—and all these lines are connected with Abraham in some way or other. In the story line of the first book of the Torah, Genesis, Abraham is not the first one connected with *bərît*. The first *bərît* of the Torah is the universal covenant that God establishes with *Noah and every living creature*, but as soon as the narrative turns to the particular covenant established with *Abraham and his descendants*, the reader notes that the book of Genesis uses almost the same wording for both manifestations of the concept “covenant.”⁵ The important verbs are *QūM*, “establish,” and *NTN*, “give, make.” Each manifestation of the covenant is illustrated by a “sign of the covenant” (*’ôt bərît*) and characterized as an “everlasting covenant” (*bərît ’ólām*). In each case, the covenant extends to the descendants. The following chart summarizes the common aspects of the universal covenant with every living creature and the particular covenant with Abraham:

Universal Covenant Established with Noah and Every Living Creature	The Particular Covenant Established with Abram and His Descendants
Gen 6:18 + 9:9, 11 (<i>QūM</i> , “establish”), Gen 9:12 (<i>NTN</i> , “give, make”)	Gen 17:2 (<i>NTN</i> , “give, make”), Gen 17:7 (<i>QūM</i> , “establish”)

⁵ The Hebrew term *bərît* does not form a plural (see Koch, *Covenant*, 900); hence, it is appropriate to assume that the concept of “covenant” implies that there exists only one single covenant between God and human beings, not a variety of particular covenants with various groups and varying degrees of obligation or stability. However, this concept of the single covenant that God offers unfolds in various and particular “manifestations.” These terminological considerations have theological implications: Since God in the Hebrew Bible (and the Christian Bible as well) always remains one and the same, it is theologically suitable to speak of one and the same *bərît*, covenant, that God offers to human beings. However, as the human side of the covenant is naturally a subject to changes, God realizes various manifestations of the divine covenant in the course of time.—The similarity between the covenant with Noah and the subsequent covenant between God and Abraham is a well known feature, see, e.g., Bautch, Richard J., *Glory and Power, Ritual and Relationship: The Sinai Covenant in the Postexilic Period* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 471) New York/London: T & T Clark, 2009, 10.

The sign of the covenant (<i>'ôt bārît</i>): the bow in the clouds (Gen 9:12–13, 15, 17)	The sign of the covenant (<i>'ôt bārît</i>): circumcision (Gen 17:11)
everlasting covenant (<i>bārît 'ôlām</i>) (Gen 9:16)	everlasting covenant (<i>bārît 'ôlām</i>) (Gen 17:13)
<i>QūM</i> (“establish”) with you and your descendants (Gen 9:9) ... and every living creature/all flesh (Gen 9:15–17)	<i>QūM</i> (“establish”) – with Isaac (Gen 17:21)

Thus, both manifestations of the covenant are closely interconnected: The particular covenant with Abraham and his descendants⁶ and the universal covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature are two sides of the same coin, or, as Gen 12:3 puts it, “in you [Abram] all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”⁷

However, the terminology that the universal covenant has in common with the particular covenant, i.e., “establishing (*QūM*), making (*NTN*) a covenant” and “sign of the covenant,” does not occur in the manifestations of the concept “covenant” *after* Abraham. In these manifestations in Exodus to Deuteronomy, a second set of terms appears, which is, however, also connected to Abraham: “to cut (*KRT*) a covenant, to keep (*ŠMR*) or to break (*PRR*) the covenant.” Hence, Abraham emerges as the hinge or pivot – or: prefiguration – of the concept of covenant in the Torah.

⁶ While Gen 17:21 notes a particular covenant with Isaac, there is no explicit manifestation of a covenant with Jacob. However, Exod 2:24, the remembrance of the covenant with all three Patriarchs, presupposes that the covenant with Abraham and Isaac also extends to Jacob.

⁷ The thematic line of the covenant God “established” (*QūM* qal) with Abraham and his descendants develops further in Exod 6:4 (*QūM* qal) and expands to the promise that God will “maintain” or “confirm” (*QūM* hipil) his covenant in Lev 26:9. It finally culminates in Deut 8:18: The LORD “may confirm (*QūM* hipil) his covenant that he swore (*ŠB* ‘niphil) to your ancestors.”

2.2 The Covenant that God Makes (“Cuts”: *KRT*) – An Ascending Line

God “makes” (literally, “cuts”, *KRT*) a *bərît* with Abram, Moses, and Israel thirteen times in the Torah.⁸ An ascending thematic line stretches from the past via the present to the future, i.e., from Abram (the past) via the Israelites of the narrated situation (the present) down to the future generations of all times:

Past:	Gen 15:18 (“On that day the LORD made a covenant with <i>Abram</i> ”)
Present:	Exod 24:8 (“See the blood of the covenant ⁹ that the LORD has made with you” [<i>the Israelites</i>]); Exod 34:10.27; Deut 4:23; 9:9; 29:24 (Eng. 29:25); 31:16 Deut 5:2–3: “The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our ancestors did the LORD make his covenant, but with us, who are all of us alive <i>today</i> .” Deut 28:69: “These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb.”
Future:	Deut 29:11–14 (Eng. 29:12–15): “ ¹² to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, sworn by an oath, which the LORD your God is making with you today; ¹³ in order that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. ¹⁴ I am making this covenant, sworn by an oath, not only with you who stand here with us today before the LORD our God, ¹⁵ but also <i>with those who are not here with us today.</i> ” [= <i>the future generations</i>]

As Robert Brawley states about the passage in Deuteronomy 29, “When Moses begins his farewell address, he construes the entrance of his people into covenant with God as a part of

⁸ See Gen 15:18 (*Abram*); Exod 24:8; 34:10 (*Israel*); 34:27 (*Moses and Israel*); Deut 4:23; 5:2–3; 9:9; 28:69; 29:11.13 (*Israel*); 29:24 (*the ancestors*); 31:16 (*Israel*).

⁹ The ritual with the “blood of the covenant” is unique to the Hebrew Bible and binds the people to life and death (cf. Deut 30:15–20). “It accomplishes this task with the ... bifurcated application of the “blood of the covenant” (*dam-habbərît*) upon the altar representing YHWH on the one hand and upon the people on the other” (Koch, *Covenant*, 903).

the Abrahamic covenant (29:12–13; cf. 30:20; 34:4). So the Deuteronomist collapses the Sinaitic covenant with the Abrahamic.”¹⁰

One might speculate why the verb *KRT*, “make,” does not appear in relation to Noah and the covenant with every living creature. Maybe this verb implies some kind of response from the non-divine party (Abram, the Israelites), which cannot be expected from “every living creature.”

2.3 The Eternal Covenant (*bərît ʾôlām*)

The term “eternal covenant” (*bərît ʾôlām*) appears within the terminology of the universal covenant with every living creature (Gen 9:16), in the wording of the particular covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:7, 13, 19), and also in the prescriptions for the covenant with the Israelites (Exod 31:16; Lev 24:8). Abraham is the “man in the middle” and theologically connects Israel’s relationship to God (“covenant”) with God’s relationship to every human being or even every living creature. Via Abraham, God’s particular covenant with Israel is essentially another manifestation of one and the same eternal covenant.

The manifestations differ, however, with respect to the category of time. There is an ascending thread from the beginning of creation via the beginning of a new human male life to the beginning of a new week:

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Gen 9:16	every living creature	the beginning of the renewed <i>creation</i> after the flood (“life” in general)
Gen 17:7, 13, 19	Abraham; circumcision	the beginning of a new (<i>human male</i>) <i>life</i> in form of a corporeal marker
Exod 31:16	Israelites, observing the sabbath	the beginning of a new <i>week</i> (after the Sabbath): Thus, the <i>eternal covenant</i> covers every level: the creation, the human life-span, the week
Lev 24:8	the bread in the Tabernacle, every sabbath renewed	

¹⁰ Brawley, Robert L., Reverberations of Abrahamic Covenant Traditions in the Ethics of Matthew, in: Williams, Prescott H. (Hg.), *Realia Dei. Essays in Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Edward F. Campbell, Jr.*, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999, 26–46, 29–30.

The observation of the sabbath constitutes a perpetual covenant according to Exod 31:16—and according to Exod 31:13, 17 the observation of the sabbath is also called a “sign” (*’ôl*). Rolf Rendtorff concludes: “This terminology clearly corresponds to that of Genesis 9 ... The covenant of the sabbath responds to the covenant given to Noah (Genesis 9). ... Thus, God’s everlasting covenant given to the world and humanity finds its response in the sabbath, which is called ‘an everlasting covenant’ as well.”¹¹

In a metaphorical way, salt functions in Lev 2:13 and Num 18:19 as a symbol for durability, permanence, stability, and eternity. In a further development, the eternal covenant finds a particular expression in the promise of “a covenant of perpetual priesthood” to the Aaronide Phinehas and his descendants, i.e., the genealogical line of the Aaronide priesthood (Num 25:13).

2.4 The Covenant One Shall Keep (*ŠMR*) – Reciprocity

After establishing a covenant, the parties are summoned to “keep” (*ŠMR*) the covenant. Abraham and his descendants should keep the covenant symbolized in the circumcision (Gen 17:9, 10).¹² According to Exod 19:5, Israel will become God’s treasured possession out of all the peoples, if Israel keeps God’s covenant. However, Deut 7:9, 12 demonstrates that “keeping” is a *reciprocal concept*: God *keeps* the covenant with those who *keep* his commandments.¹³

¹¹ Rolf Rendtorff, “Covenant” as a Structuring Concept in Genesis and Exodus, in: JBL 108 (1989) 385–393, here: 392.

¹² See Rendtorff, “Covenant,” 392. Rendtorff rightly observes: “It is, of course, the same covenant [as the one of Genesis 15, T.H.]. But there is an element of human response which belongs indispensably to that covenant.” – Later on, Philo of Alexandria states with reference to Gen 26:5 that Abraham kept all the law, though it was unwritten, by nature, and the written law that Israel shall keep is a copy of the archetypal law that Abraham observed, see *Migr.* 130; *Abr.* 275. According to Philo, *Abr.* 3–6, Abraham shares this feature of keeping the unwritten law by nature with the “earliest men” (*scil.* Enoch and Noah) in Genesis.

¹³ God is the one who keeps the covenant, see the recurring expression in Deut 7:9; 1 Kings 8:23 [par. 2 Chron 6:14]; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:5; 9:32; cf. Rendtorff, “Covenant,” 390: “This is a sort of epithet that characterizes God’s nature and behavior toward his people.”

Keeping the covenant is only possible if one knows about the relevant conditions and contents. Thus, it is crucial that Moses reads (*QR*) the book of the covenant to the people and that they accept the conditions (Exod 24:7). In the same vein, Deut 4:13–14 states that God declared (*NGD*) to Israel his covenant on two stone tablets, while he charged Moses to teach the people the statutes and ordinances. Moses' blessing assigns to the Levites a mediatory role as teachers of God's law and ordinances because they observe God's word and keep his covenant (Deut 33:9).

2.5 To Break the Covenant (*PRR*) – No Reciprocity

The antonym of keeping the covenant is breaking it (*PRR*). In the context of Abraham, the possibility is already mentioned that someone might break (*PRR*) the covenant: the uncircumcised male (Gen 17:14).¹⁴ The Torah also foresees that the Israelites will break the covenant (Lev 26:15; Deut 31:16, 20). However, it makes clear that this is a *non-reciprocal concept*: God will *never* break the covenant (Lev 26:44)! God will always fulfill his duties towards Israel – even if Israel fails to fulfill her duties towards God.

Three more verbs express the breaking of the covenant: Moses warns the Israelites not to “forget” (*ŠKH*) the covenant (Deut 4:23) because God will *not forget* the covenant with their ancestors that he swore to them (Deut 4:31). One “transgresses” the covenant (*BR*) by going to serve other gods (Deut 17:2–3).¹⁵ Deuteronomy also announces that the nations will find the reason for the great distress and destruction that Israel will suffer during war and exile in the sixth century: “It is because they ‘abandoned’ (*ZB*) the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors” (Deut 29:24, Eng. 29:25).

2.6 The Covenant that God Remembers (*ZKR*) – Salvation

Despite Israel tending to “forget” (*ŠKH*) the covenant, God will “remember” (*ZKR*) the covenant. This important antonym forms the key term for God's salvific acts for creation in general and for Israel in particular: God's salvation begins with God's remembrance of the covenant. On a universal level, God's remembrance of his covenant with Noah and every

¹⁴ However, such a transgression does not affect the covenant as such (the covenantal structure of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, “thus accounting for the fact that, despite the continuous possibility of Israel's disobedience, this covenant remains an ‘everlasting covenant.’” Nihan, *Priestly Covenant*, 126.

¹⁵ The same verb, *BR*, can also mean to “enter into the covenant,” see Deut 29:11 (Eng. 29:12).

living creature means that God will never again destroy all flesh (Gen 9:15–16).¹⁶ In particular, remembering his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob leads God to redeem his people from Egypt, the house of slavery (Exod 2:24; 6:2–8). The remembrance triggers a new manifestation of the covenant, this time, as a covenant with the people as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God” (the so-called covenant formula in Exod 6:7).¹⁷

Leviticus 26 announces for the future that both manifestations of the covenant, the covenant with Jacob, with Isaac, and with Abraham (note the sequence in Lev 26:42) as well as the covenant with the ancestors whom God brought out of the land of Egypt (Lev 26:45), will trigger God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness towards the sinful people many generations after the exodus.¹⁸ All the curses mentioned in Leviticus 26 reflect the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as well as the Exile: God had to punish the people who broke God’s covenant (26:15), but the story does not end here. God’s remembrance (*ZKR*) of the covenant is essential for a salvific new beginning after the Exile. Centuries after his alleged appearance, Abraham again plays a vital role: The patriarch of ancient times is present as the literary and theological key to the everlasting covenant, which God will reactivate (biblically spoken: will “remember,” *ZKR*) in order to give a new beginning. The Abrahamic covenant alone, however, does not ensure the future blessing. Here, Israel’s repentance is indispensable: The people confess their iniquity (Lev 26:40), and they make satisfaction for their iniquity (26:41).¹⁹

¹⁶ See, e.g., Rendtorff, “Covenant,” 387.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 391.

¹⁸ On the role of the covenant in Leviticus 26 see Thomas Hieke, *The Covenant in Leviticus 26: A Concept of Admonition and Redemption*, in: Bautch, Richard J.; Knoppers, Gary N. (ed.), *Covenant in the Persian Period. From Genesis to Chronicles*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015, 75–89; Bautch, *Glory*, 54–57, 71–74. Bautch notes, “There is a synthesis of the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants in Lev 26 suggesting that an initial stage of reactivation, realized shortly after the exile in terms of the Abrahamic covenant, has been followed by covenantal renewal proper along Sinaitic lines” (p. 73).

¹⁹ See Bautch, *Appraisal*, 60; *id.*, *Glory*, 84–86.

Deuteronomy connects the remembrance (*ZKR*) of the covenant with the verb *šB* ' nifal, "to swear:" God will not forget (will maintain, will confirm) the covenant that he swore to the ancestors (Deut 4:31; 7:12; 8:18; see also 29:12-15; 31:20).²⁰

2.7 A Covenant Among Human Beings

In a few cases, the Torah uses *bərît* to refer to a covenant among human beings. The distribution is significant: (a) Abraham has *allies* (*ba ʿălê bərît*) in Gen 14:13 (LXX: *συνωμόται*), and he *makes* (*KRT*) a covenant with Abimelech (21:27, 32). Isaac does the same (Gen 26:28), and Laban *makes* (*KRT*) a covenant with Jacob (Gen 31:44). Thus, *the Patriarchs* make covenants with other groups in order to settle conflicts and live in peace. (b) On the other hand, *the Israelites* are *not* allowed to *make* a covenant with other peoples (the inhabitants of the land), in order to avoid making a covenant with other gods (Exod 23:32; 34:12, 15; Deut 7:2). Hence, there are two types of covenants among human beings: the "Abraham-type," which leads to peace between neighbors, and that which compromises Israel's covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Israel has to avoid the latter but might learn from the Abraham-type covenant: living in peace with one's neighbors without adopting their religion.

3 Conclusion

After a first reading along the story *line* of the Torah from Genesis to Deuteronomy, one needs to re-read it. This second reading opens a conceptual *field* that discloses the theological concept circling around a central term. A re-reading of the Torah focusing on the 82 occurrences of the term *bərît* reveals Abram/Abraham as the central prefiguration of the covenant.²¹ All manifestations of the concept "covenant" are connected to Abraham in

²⁰ See Koch, *Covenant*, 906.

²¹ Rendtorff, "Covenant," 393, points in the same direction when he states: "The use of the word *bərît* in other texts between these two key stories [i.e., the Primeval History, Genesis 1–11, and the Sinai story in Exodus 19–34, T.H.] shows a network of references and interrelations whereby human involvement in the covenant as a response to God's gift is emphasized in different ways: circumcision is the first 'sign of covenant' as a response to God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 17). Obedience to the commandments is Israel's response to God's guidance and gift of the covenant (Exod 19:4–6; 24:3–8), and the sabbath as a 'sign' of the 'everlasting covenant' (31:12–17) links Israel's religious life to the first covenant by which God restored the creation once

various ways. As a theological consequence, there is only *one covenant* that God offers to humanity in a number of ways.²² The *one and only covenant* manifests itself in different situations with different groups and persons, but in each case, Abraham is involved. The major thematic lines are indicated by particular verbs or phrases associated with *bərît*, and all of these lines are connected with Abraham.²³

(1) In the book of Genesis, the first manifestation of “covenant” is the *universal covenant* with Noah, his descendants (i.e., humanity in general), and every living creature. For this covenant, Genesis uses nearly identical phrases as those for the *particular covenant* God establishes with Abram/Abraham and his descendants (especially Isaac): to establish, to give, sign of the covenant, everlasting covenant (Gen 6:18; 9:9–17; 17:2–21).

(2) In the *past*, God *made* (*KRT*) a covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:18). In the *present* story line of the Torah, God *makes* a covenant with the Israelites (Exod 24:8 etc.; “today:” Deut

and for all (Genesis 9).”—Bautch, *Glory*, 43–45, underscores the preeminent role of the figure of Abraham for the “renovation” of the tradition of the Sinai covenant in the postexilic period.

²² See also Christoph Dohmen, *Der Sinaibund als Neuer Bund nach Ex 19–34*, in: Zenger, Erich (ed.), *Der Neue Bund im Alten: Zur Bundestheologie der beiden Testamente* (QD 146), Freiburg i.Br. et al.: Herder, 1993, 51–83, 79–81.—Nihan, *Priestly Covenant*, 115, points out: “For the scribes who edited the Pentateuch, there could only be, ultimately, *one* comprehensive covenant between Yahweh and Israel.” Nihan correctly demonstrates that Leviticus 26 and Numbers 25 use the term *bərît ‘ōlām* in order to establish a synthesis between the Priestly and the non-Priestly definitions of the covenant (*ibid.*, 127).

²³ This feature implicitly reappears in the reception in the New Testament, e.g., in Luke-Acts; see Brawley, Robert L., *Abrahamic Covenant Traditions and the Characterization of God in Luke-Acts*, in: Joseph, Verheyden (ed.), *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (BETL 142), Leuven: Peeters, 1999, 109–32. Brawley presents “firm evidence that Abrahamic traditions are indispensable for the characterization of God. God’s promises to Abraham are conspicuous at narrative beginnings (Mary, Zechariah, the Baptizer) and foreshadow the mission of Jesus. The healing of the woman bent double and the salvation of Zacchaeus as instances of Abrahamic heritage are reiterated features of Jesus’ profile. God’s acts to fulfill Abrahamic promises are also foundational for new beginnings in Acts. ... Luke-Acts ... synthesizes covenant traditions ... The Abrahamic covenant is a characterization of God with respect to history. God promises to bless all the families of the earth at canonical narrative beginnings (Gen 12,1–3). Davidic and Mosaic covenants are related to the Abrahamic covenant as part of a sequence. They are particular ways God moves the promises toward their term. For Luke-Acts, Mosaic, Davidic, and Abrahamic covenants do not compete with each other but function properly when they play their role in a holistic program” (pp. 130–2). The same holds true for the Gospel of Matthew, as Brawley, *Reverberations*, 32–46, convincingly demonstrates.

5:3; “in the land of Moab:” Deut 28:69), but this covenant also covers the *future* generations (“those who are not here with us today:” Deut 29:15).

(3) Hence, the covenant is *eternal* (*bərît ‘ōlām*). This phrase occurs first at the beginning of the renewed *creation* after the flood (Gen 9:16) and reappears in the context of Abraham at the beginning of each *human male life*, i.e., the circumcision (Gen 17:7, 13, 19). The Israelites remember the everlasting covenant at the beginning of each *week* by observing the sabbath (Exod 31:16) and renewing the bread in the Tabernacle (Lev 24:8). Thus, God’s particular covenant with Israel goes back via Abraham to the covenant with all humans (Noah) and all living creatures.

(4) God summons Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:9, 10) as well as the Israelites (Exod 19:5) *to keep* (*ŠMR*) the covenant. Keeping the covenant follows the principle of *reciprocity*: God *keeps* the covenant with those who *keep* his commandments (Deut 7:9, 12).

(5) The antonym of “to keep” is “to break” (*PRR*). This verb occurs already in the context of Abraham and the circumcision (Gen 17:14). The Torah knows that Israel will break the covenant (Lev 26:15; Deut 31:16, 20); however, God will never break the covenant (Lev 26:44). Therefore, there is *no reciprocity* regarding this point.

(6) After a breakup of the covenant, God grants forgiveness and a new beginning, which is triggered by God’s *remembrance* (*ZKR*) of the covenant: After the flood, God enables a new beginning by establishing a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature (Gen 9:8–17; in fact, a renewal of the proclaimed covenant in Gen 6:18). God promises that the waters will never again destroy all flesh (Gen 9:15): The new beginning will never be threatened by a flood again, since God will remember the covenant with Noah and every living creature. Later on, God starts his redeeming acts (the Exodus) and grants forgiveness for Israel (after the Exile) by remembering his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 2:24; 6:2–8; Lev 26:42) and the ancestors liberated from Egypt (Lev 26:45). Abraham becomes the key to a renewal of the covenant.

(7) Regarding the covenant among human beings, the covenant according to Abraham makes peace with one’s neighbors without adopting their religion or compromising one’s (Israel’s) relationship with Yahweh.

In sum, Abraham prefigures the overall concept of covenant in the Torah and thus embodies the bridge between God's particular covenant with Israel and God's universal covenant with all humans and living creatures.

As a final footnote, I may add a speculative thought about the literary origin and history of the different manifestations of the concept of "covenant." The oldest or first idea probably was a covenant between Israel as a nation and her god Yahweh, maybe formally designed according to and ideologically aimed against the Assyrian vassal treaties at the end of the Royal Period. As this manifestation became problematic with the crisis of the nation, i.e., the conquests of the Babylonians, a more stable principle was needed. The theologians discovered Abraham (and God's promises to him and his descendants) as a literary warrantor for Israel's new existence after the Exile. Almost at the same time the idea of monotheism (Yahweh as the one and only god, the ruler of the earth and the universe) emerged. Hence, it became necessary to develop a manifestation of "covenant" that stretches the entire earth. This universal covenant was designed according to the pattern of the covenant with Abraham.

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Excursus: The differences in the Septuagint (87 occurrences of διαθήκη, +5)

	reference	MT	LXX	Remark
–	Gen 14:13	<i>ba’ālê bārît</i>	συνωμόται	
(+)	Exod 23:22	—	φυλάξτε τὴν διαθήκην μου	not in LXX ^{G6}
+	Exod 27:21	<i>’al hā’ēdūt</i>	ἐπὶ τῆς διαθήκης	
+	Exod 31:7	<i>hā’ārōn lā’ēdūt</i>	τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης	
+	Exod 39:14[33]	—	τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης	
(+)	Lev 26:11	<i>miškānī</i>	τὴν διαθήκην μου	LXX ^{G6} : τὴν σκηνήν μου
+	Deut 9:5	<i>haddābār</i>	τὴν διαθήκην αὐτοῦ	+ <i>QūM!</i>
–	Deut 9:15	<i>lūhōt habbārît</i>	πλάκες —	
+	Deut 29:19	<i>bassēper hazze</i>	τῆς διαθήκης ταύτης	

Gematria: value of *bārît* (*bryt*): 2+200+10+400=612; cf. 613 mitzvot.