

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE
SINAITIC AND ABRAHAMIC
COVENANTS



PASTOR TIMOTHY DOW

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by

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DANIEL DOW, D.D. (1772-1849), was born at Ashford, Connecticut in 1790. He entered the sophomore class at Yale College, and graduated with high honor, in September, 1793. He was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Association of Windham County as a Congregationalist in 1795, and was called to become the pastor of the Church at Thomson, Connecticut in the same year. He was elected a corporate member of the American Board of Foreign Missions in 1840. Also in 1840 he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Williams College. Of particular interest is Dr. Dow's publication of *A Dissertation on the Sinaitic and Abrahamic Covenants: Shewing the Former to be only Temporary; the Latter Everlasting*, in 1811. The following appendix well summarizes his conclusions.

While reading this short article, the reader is encouraged to keep in mind the fundamental truth that the promise concerning Israel's ethnic and national origination, as well as the incorporated promise of the Land, was always associated with the Abrahamic Covenant and never the Sinaitic Covenant. The ramifications of this truth are considerable.

As the Sinaitic and Abrahamic Covenants have often been confounded together, and have even, not infrequently, been represented as being one and the same covenant, only differently dispensed; perhaps it may not be wholly useless, so subjoin the following marks of difference between them.

1. These two Covenants differ in respect to time. The Sinaitic Covenant had no existence previous to the exodus from Egypt. The Abrahamic Covenant was confirmed of God in Christ 430 years before, and for substance, had been dispensed from the days of paradise.

2. They differ in respect of their promises. The Sinaitic Covenant promised only temporal blessings. The Abrahamic Covenant promised eternal life. I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee, throughout their generations. Now God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

3. They differ in respect to conditionality. The Sinaitic Covenant was a conditional one. The blessings promised were suspended upon the obedience of those who were the subjects of them. The Abrahamic Covenant was absolute and unconditional. God himself engages to see to the full and complete execution of it. I

will exceedingly multiply thee. I *will* be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee. I *will* write my law in their hearts. I *will* be to them a God, and they *shall* be to me a people.

4. They differ as it respects to surety. The Sinaitic Covenant had no surety. If the people themselves fulfilled the conditions prescribed, then they were to be the subjects of the blessings proposed. But they had no surety, to see that the requisite conditions were performed. But the Abrahamic Covenant, or the Covenant of Grace, has a surety. *By so much was Jesus made the surety of a better covenant* (Heb. 7:22).

5. They differ in respect to their extent. The Sinaitic Covenant was made only with the Israelitish nation, including the few proselytes that might be incorporated with them. But for any other nation beside them, that peculiar Covenant was never designed. The Abrahamic Covenant extends, not only to the natural descendants of Abraham, but to all other nations who become the children of Abraham by faith. *According to that which was spoken, so shall thy seed be* (Rom. 4:18).

6. They differ in respect to their duration. The Sinaitic Covenant was only temporary; *imposed till the time of reformation* [Heb. 9:10]; but after that, this ministration of death was abolished. It decayed; it waxed old; it vanished away. But the Abrahamic Covenant is everlasting. The law which was four hundred and thirty years after, could not disannul it. It extends to all believers, and, consequently, must endure for ever.

7. They differ as it respects their accomplishment. The Sinaitic Covenant, by the house of Israel in general, to say the

least, was never kept; and as there was a failure in the performance of the conditions, the blessings contemplated were not conferred. *Which my covenant they brake, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord* [Heb. 8:9]. But the Abrahamic Covenant not being suspended upon any condition to be performed by men, but upon the absolute promise of God; and the Son of God himself being a *surety* to see to the execution of it; in this Covenant, there never hath been, and never can be, the least failure. God always hath remembered, and always will remember, his holy covenant to perform the oath which he sware to our father Abraham. Abraham, then, shall never fail of having a seed throughout all generations, and the law of God shall certainly be written in their hearts [Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-13].

8. They are called, in Scripture, by different names. The one is called old; and the other a new covenant. The one is called the ministration of death; the other the ministration of the Spirit. The one is called a bond maid, the other a free-woman. *These are the two covenants* (Gal. 4:24).¹



¹ Daniel Dow, *A Dissertation On The Sinaitic and Abrahamic Covenants: Shewing the Former to be only Temporary; the Latter Everlasting*. Hartford: Peter B. Gleason and Co, 1811, pages 69-71.