

## **Abrahamic Covenant**

Text: Genesis 12:1-3, 15, Galatians 3

The central covenant to understanding the history of the Old Testament hangs on the understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant. All covenants of scripture coverages and finds their meaning in Christ. From the very beginning, God was moving history towards an ultimate consummation in Christ. "For all the promises of God in him (Christ) are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." 2 Corinthians 1:20--- **For all the promises of God find their Yes in him** (ESV).

His covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David were but stepping stones leading to the Messiah. Long ago, at many times and <sup>a</sup>in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets... (**Hebrews 1:1**). But His revelation of Himself and of His will for mankind was partial and incomplete. The purpose of this study is to show that all of the Old Testament history finds its culmination in fulfillment in Christ.

**Today's Lesson:** We'll explore the new covenant as the fulfillment of promises made to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant: 1) Land, 2) Seed (Offspring), 3) Blessing.

### **1). Land Promise:**

**Genesis 12:1** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country ... to the land that I will show you. The land is located where modern Israel is today.

### **2) Seed Promise:**

**Genesis 12:2** ... the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country ... to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation ...

**Genesis 15:5** And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

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### **3) Blessing Promise**

**Genesis 12:2-3** "Go from your country ... to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you ... **The blessing promise included three types of blessing:**

#### **a) Prosperity:**

Genesis 24:34-35 "And he said, I am Abraham's servant. And the Lord hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses."

#### **b) Protection:**

**Genesis 12:3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse ...

#### **c) Pardon:**

**Genesis 15:5-6** "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

This is a big deal! When God promised him offspring as numerous as there are stars, Abraham simply believed what God told him. He responded in faith. The truth of justification by faith runs straight through from Genesis to Revelation. **John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

### **The Covenant Cut**

#### **What did God tell Abram to do in Genesis 15:7-11?**

Why did God want Abram to cut these animals in half and then arrange the halves opposite each other (**15:9-11**)? Though the meaning of all this is obscure to society today, it was quite common then. This was the way that treaties or covenants were made between kings. The technical term describing the event was that they would "**cut a covenant**", which points to the ancient rite of cutting an animal as part of a ritual used in the forming

of the covenant. The animal was slaughtered and cut into two or three parts. This may be the origin of our phrase, "Let's cut a deal".

As seen in **Jeremiah 34:18-19**, the two parties of the covenant then passed between the pieces of the animals. The symbolism apparently was that if either party broke the covenant, then he would be killed just like the animals had been. **Jeremiah 34:18-19** ... the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts ...

**Significant:** According to the normal treaty custom of the day, Abraham expected God to somehow appear and walk through the pieces along with Abraham.

### **Why is the information contained in Genesis 15:11 significant?**

According to Genesis 15:12, what happened to Abram as the sun was setting? A deep sleep fell on Abram (15:12a). It is an important fact that Abraham was out cold. Skip the rest of the paragraph (15:13-15) and go to **15:17-18**.

### **What did God promise in this covenant (Ge 15:17-21)?**

God promised Abraham Middle Eastern real estate, roughly the land possessed by modern Israel. How did the LORD ratify this covenant (**Ge 15:17-18**)? God ratified this covenant by walking alone between the pieces.

### **What was Abram doing during all this (Ge 15:17-18)? See 15:12.**

Abraham was sleeping. This necessarily meant that he did not walk between the pieces as would normally have been the custom.

### **What is the significance of the smoking fire and flaming torch passing between the pieces alone (Ge 15:17-21)? See, Galatians 3:16-18.**

Normally both parties of a covenant passed between the pieces. The smoking fire and burning lamp's solo movement between the pieces **suggests this is a one-sided covenant. God alone is responsible for the fulfillment of the promises of the covenant.**

**Test:** Is this covenant conditional or unconditional (**Ge 15:17-21**)? Why? See **Galatians 3:15-18**. It is unconditional since its fulfillment is guaranteed by God. Abram slept through its ratification.

Illustration: Though Abraham was a man of faith, he kept doing dumb things that would have made the promises null and void if their fulfillment depended on Law obedience by Abraham. For example, he later moved out of the Promised Land and down to Egypt and twice tried to give away his wife to save his life!

### **Shadow/Substance (The New Testament):**

*God's covenant with Abraham is very much like the New Covenant in that both are unilateral covenants, both are based on promise (and not law), both are totally dependent on God's performance (not ours). I would not trust the best five minutes I ever lived to get me into heaven.*

### **Shadow/Substance (Christ's Death):**

The Abrahamic Covenant was unilateral; God took all the responsibility on Himself. Normally if one party failed, the other could do to him as had been done to the animals. Abraham clearly would have failed to live up to the covenant, just as we would have failed. In a sense, since God is totally responsible, He became a man and died in Abraham's place as payment for Abraham's failure. Since God took responsibility for both sides He not only kept his promises but also dealt divine justice upon his own Son.

## **The Duration of the Covenant**

**How long did God declare that this covenant would be in effect (Ge 17:7)?**

## **The Sign of the Covenant**

Every covenant in the Bible had a sign of the covenant to remind the parties of their covenant obligations. What is the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Ge 17:11)?

ESV Genesis 17:11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a **sign** of the covenant ...

## The Fulfillments of the Covenant

God's covenant with Abraham had both near and far fulfillments. It is often called prophetic perspective or a double fulfillment.

### Promised Land Fulfillments

**"The principle rule of interpreting scripture is that scripture interprets scripture."**

Comparing Ge 15:17-18 to 1 Kings 4:21, what can we learn about the fulfillment of the land promise? Land promise was clearly fulfilled (the near fulfillment).

**Genesis 15:17-18** "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates ..."

**1 Kings 4:21** Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates ... to the border of Egypt.

What did **Joshua 21:43-45** and **Nehemiah 9:7-8** declare about the Promised Land? Israel got all the land God promised. We must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. The land promise was fulfilled. Remember this later (it is very significant).

**Joshua 21:43-45** And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

**Nehemiah 9:7-8** Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram... and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites... to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous..

### New Covenant Perspective on the Promised Land

**The land promise was clearly fulfilled. Why, then, did Abraham live in tents, like a stranger in Paradise?** According to **Hebrews 11:8-10**, Abraham

was looking for something far more significant than Middle Eastern real estate. The difference between what Abraham was promised and what he got was like living in a foreign country. He understood the Promised Land was just a shadow of a much greater spiritual reality. He longed for a heavenly city, a supernatural city.

**Application:** Like Abraham, this world is not really our home. We should not get too worked up over politics or nationalism: **Philippians 3:20** . . . *our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ* . . . “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ”

**Application:** We need to learn from Abraham’s example: Everything in the Hebrew Scriptures is just a shadow of the reality we have in Christ and the New Testament. What is this city with foundations that has God as its designer and builder (11:10) Abraham was looking for what we know as the Heavenly Jerusalem or the New Jerusalem. Read **Hebrews 12:18-24**. We have come to Mt Zion, not Mt. Sinai. We have come to the Heavenly Jerusalem not the earthly Jerusalem. We have to Jesus and the New Covenant, not Moses and the Old Covenant. According to **Hebrews 13:14**, what city to come do we seek? **Revelation 21:2** I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The church already is the bride of Christ. In one sense this is another way of describing the church. The church exists right now on earth. But in the the church in prospect will be exalted as Christ’s bride upon His return at the marriage banquet of the Lamb. This city is both now and not yet.

**Shadow/Substance (Heaven):** The Promised Land was a shadow of heaven, our eternal home.

**What does the Promised Land represent (Hebrews 11:13-16)?** It represents a heavenly country.

**This is really huge: Abraham got nothing promised! What does 11:13 declare about the Promised Land? See: 11:39-40.**

It boldly states that he did take possession what was really promised; he did not live to see the land promise fulfilled! He did embrace it by faith!

**How many of God's promises did Abraham live to see fulfilled (11:13)?**

None of them! Although they saw the initial shadow fulfillments of God's promises, they knew there was something better and died in faith awaiting it: Jesus and the New Covenant.

**The Old Testament declares they got it, that the promises were fulfilled, but the New Testament declares they didn't get what was promised, We see the great difference between shadow and substance.**

Based on Hebrews **11:14-16** what were these people really looking for? Real estate is not what was really promised. Abraham understood that the Promised Land was only a shadow/type of something much better. They were seeking a heavenly country. Just as the tabernacle was a copy of heavenly reality, so too the Promised Land was only a type, only a shadow, only a picture of the true, the real, the ultimate heavenly country.

**2 Peter 3:13 ... according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**

**Summary:** The Promised Land was a shadow of heaven.

### **The Seed Promise Fulfilled**

***"The principle rule of interpreting scripture is that scripture interprets scripture."***

**Genesis 22:17** I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

**1 Kings 4:20** Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea.

**The Seed promise was clearly fulfilled (the near fulfillment).** The physical offspring of Abraham were only a shadow, a type, of something much more important ... *If we had only the Old Testament I could see where people could believe the promises to Abraham had to have a physical fulfillment only and that perhaps something greater was instore for them in terms of physical real-estate in the Middle East. But, we have the NT. A rule of solid*

*biblical interpretation is that the NT shines light on the OT. The NT shows us the true meaning of the OT.*

**According to Galatians 3:16, what was God really promising Abraham when He promised him offspring?**

**Singular Offspring:** The New Testament states that what God really promised Abraham was one particular ultimate offspring (singular) and that it was a prophecy about the coming of Jesus, Abraham's ultimate descendant. The word offspring can be either singular or plural without changing form. (The word seed is the same way—Burpee puts out a seed catalog not a seeds catalog.)

**Shadow/Substance (Jesus):** Abraham's son Isaac was the shadow; Jesus is the substance. Jesus is the true Offspring.

**Plural Offspring:** God promised that from Abraham would come an entire nation of people, as numerous as the sands of the sea. We know those offspring as the ancient Israelites. **They were the near fulfillment.** As regards the plural aspect of the word offspring, what does **Galatians 3:28-29** declare about the **far fulfillment**?

**Shadow/Substance:** Physical Israel was the shadow, Spiritual Israel is the substance. The Saved are Eschatological Israel. Anyone with the faith of Abraham is the true, promised offspring of Abraham.

*"The principle rule of interpreting scripture is that scripture interprets scripture.*

### **Not Offspring Anymore**

**Read Romans 4:11-12.....** In the truest sense, Abraham is father only of the circumcised who have the faith of Abraham. That's why Jesus said: **John 8:39** "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did." --- Of these stones.....children unto Abraham.....

**Paul clarified: Galatians 3:6-7** Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.



### **All the Saved are the True Israel**

**Galatians 6:15-16** ... neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, **and** upon the Israel of God.

**What is the “rule”?** The rule is that what counts is a new creation, not whether one is Jew or Gentile. Paul prayed peace and mercy upon “them.” Who is them? Upon those who walked by the rule that what counts in a new creation.

**Who is the Israel of God (3:16)?** The Israel of God is made up of those who walk by the rule that what counts is a new creation. **The word “and” is from kai and can be “even.”** The saved are the true Israel of God. Believers (Jew or Gentile) are the true, promised children of Abraham. The saved are now the true Israel.

**Seed Summary:** The near fulfillments of the seed promise were Isaac and the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac. The far and physical seed promise was fulfilled in Jesus, a direct descendant of Abraham. The ultimate metaphysical fulfillment lies with all those, Jew or Gentile, who have the same faith as Abraham.

### **Blessing Promises Fulfilled**

God’s blessing promise included: a) Prosperity, b) Protection, and c) Pardon. These were clearly fulfilled: Genesis 24:1 Abraham was old, well advanced in years ... the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

**“The principle rule of interpreting scripture is that scripture interprets scripture.”**

Let’s go back the blessing part of God’s promise. Who did God promise to bless in addition to Abraham (Ge 12:2-3)? Compare 22:18, 26:4, 28:12-14

God promised to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham.

According to **Galatians 3:7-9** how is the Promised Blessing been fulfilled?

God's promise to bless all nations in Abraham was fulfilled in the blessing of justification by faith, a blessing offered to Gentiles. This blessing was made possible through his ultimate descendant's (Jesus') death on the cross.

Based on **3:7**, who are the sons of Abraham? Anyone with faith in Jesus is a son of Abraham. Some will argue that this is replacement theology, but it is fulfillment theology. Really, there is nothing to replace. God's promises to ethnic Israel were only and ever to those within ethnic Israel who also had the faith of Abraham.

Many will argue that circumcision is required for entrance into the covenant community to receive the promises. I will agree! You must be circumcised. What does the scriptures say? **Romans 2:28-29** "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

**Shadow/Substance:** Physical Israel was a Shadow of the True Israel.

In **Galatians 3:8**, how was the Gospel preached beforehand in the saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed"? **The Gospel was found in prototype form in God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham's offspring Jesus. The blessing is that just as Abraham was saved by faith, so also Gentiles could be saved by faith (apart from the Law).** Remember Abraham was before the Law.

**Shadow/Substance (Gospel):** The things of the Hebrew Scriptures are shadows of the substance we have in Christ. The Blessing Promise was a shadow of the Gospel.

**What is true of all who rely on works of law (Ga 3:10-14)?** All who rely on works of law to be justified are under the curse of the law.

**Shadow/Substance (Hell):** The curses of the Book of the Law are shadows of a much more terrible reality: the fires of hell.

**According to 3:13, how did Jesus save people from the curse of the law?**

Christ became a curse for us, in our place. Jesus took the curse so we get the blessing (**De 21:23**).

**Substitutionary Atonement:** Jesus' death on the cross atoned for our sins. He died as our substitute. The 1st London Baptist Confession of 1646 says, "Christ ... hath ... put away sin by ... offering ... Himself a sacrifice for sin, by which He hath fully finished and suffered all things God required for the salvation of His elect, and removed all rites and shadows ..." (Insight: the shadows are have been removed!).

**According to Galatians 3:14, how does the blessing of Abraham come to the Gentiles?** The blessing comes in through faith in Christ.

**Acts 3:24-26** [Peter evangelizing the Jews] ... "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.<sup>26</sup> Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, *sent him to bless you (ethnic Israel), in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*"

**The essence of the blessing is to be turned from our wickedness.**

**Repentance and faith are opposite sides of the same coin.**

**Summary:** The Promised Blessing to all nations was fulfilled in the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection preached to all nations offering justification by faith apart from the Law. The blessing to all nations is the blessing of justification by faith, just as Abraham was justified by faith. The Ultimate offspring: Jesus, bought ultimate blessing: forgiveness, and the ultimate Promised Land: heaven.

Next week: **Impact of Final Fulfillments on Near Fulfillment**