



Lesson 3 | The Abrahamic Covenant

What's so significant about the Abrahamic Promise (or Covenant)? The Abrahamic covenant explicitly set forth what underlies the whole development of God's redemptive promise, word, and action. The redemption in grace from God is the unfolding of the promise given to Abraham and consequently, the covenant.

The term "covenant" connected to what God made with Abraham is used in Gen 15:18 and 17:1-21. However, the "promises" of God are also related with the word of "covenant" used (c.f. Gen 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 18:17-33; 21:12-13; 22:1-18). *Clearly, He spoke to Abraham about this more than the number of times Moses uses the word – "covenant."* However, again and again, we are told that this covenant **was the center of what God was accomplishing through Israel** (Exo 2:24; 6:4-5; Lev 26:42-44; Deut 4:31). These these covenants are "promises" or "oaths" sworn by the LORD to Abraham (Exo 13:5, 11; 33:1; Num 11:12; 14:16, 23; 32:11; Deut 1:8; 4:31; 7:7-8; cf. Gen 22:16; 26:3; 50:24).

In the New Testament, there are five mentions of the Lord's "covenant" with Abraham (Luke 1:72; Acts 3:25; 7:8; Gal 3:17; 4:24). Also, in the New Testament, the preferred term to describe this is the word "promise".

- **"Promise"** is used **nineteen times** with clear reference to the Lord's word/promise to Abraham (Acts 7:17; Rom 4:13, 14, 16, 20; Gal 3:16, 17, 18, 21, 29; 4:23; Heb 7:6; 11:9, 13, 17).
- **It is connected** by the phrase "the covenants of promise" (Eph 2:12). However, the "promise" and the "covenant" are not always synonymous.
 - Paul distinguishes the two entities in Rom 9:4. Hebrews 6:13-18, a passage dealing with God's affirmation to Abraham, articulates the relationship between the two terms.
 - The writer of Hebrews speaks of "two unchangeable things" in 6:18. The "two unchangeable things" in this context refer to (1) God's word of promise and (2) His covenant oath.

What was the overriding purpose of Messiah that the Abrahamic Covenant was building to to:

- **Genesis 3** | God seeks out Adam, who has hidden from Him (3:8-10). God sorts out and points out the sin and meets out consequences (3:11-19). God provides a covering, to enable Adam to approach Him (3:21). God promises to save Adam, through his seed (3:15). But the sin problem continues:
 - **Genesis 4** | Sin brings death within the Adamic family, perhaps viewed as the seed that through whom Satan would be crushed!
 - **Genesis 5** | Lamech kills a man for wounding him and then boasts about it (5:23-24). And Seth is born, and because of him, men begin to "call on the name of the Lord" (5:25-26). Yet by the time we reach Genesis 6 we find that the whole world has become so totally corrupt, so that God must destroy all mankind.
- a. **Genesis 6-9** | The salvation of Noah and his family amidst the judgment against the world for human sin. God begins anew with Noah but Noah, along with his son Ham, and Canaan too, will still sin (9:18-27) and the need for the promise will resume. Their future seed will yet bear, because of their sin, yet another curse on them.
- b. **Genesis 11** | Humans join in rebellion against God and against His command to disperse and to populate the whole earth. They plan to build a city, where they will dwell together, and to build a tower which reaches to heaven. God brought confusion and chaos to this plan by giving them different languages.

Things are looking very bleak for mankind. But, in Genesis chapter 12 we find a pivotal point in redemptive history: God made a covenant with Abraham. In this covenant, called the Abrahamic Covenant, God specified that the salvation and blessings which He had promised Adam and Eve, **which would be accomplished by their "seed", would be fulfilled through the "seed" of Abram and Sarai, who were elderly and who had no children!** Bruce Waltke calls this chapter "the thematic center of the Pentateuch." *While the first eleven chapters of Genesis focus primarily on the terrible consequences of sin, God's promises to Abram in Genesis 12 focus on the hope of redemption, of restored blessing and reconciliation with God. God is going to deal with the problem of sin and evil, and he is going to establish his kingdom on earth.*



Read Genesis 12:1–9 and notice the following:

- In the promise, God says, “I will” _____ times and implies it two more times.
- What is the repeated term that God says it will do to and for humanity in response to his sin? _____

God makes Five* Promises: Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To **the land which I will show you**; 2 And I will make you **a great nation**, And **I will bless you**, And **make your name great**; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And **I will bless those who bless you**, And the one who curses you I will curse. And **in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.**”

(1) **A shown land,**

- a. God promises Abram **Canaan** with “To your offspring I will give this land” (12:7). This promise of land becomes a key theme throughout the remainder of the Old Testament. Repeated in 15:7; 22:17)
- b. Where/how does Scripture say this was fulfilled?

(2) **A great nation (2a),**

- a. God promises Abraham many nation (17:4-5). That will grow in Egypt (46:3) (Repeated in 18:18a; 22:17; 46:3; Deut 26:5)./how
- b. Where does Scripture say this was fulfilled?

(3) **A great name, the blessing of Abram himself (2b),**

- a. (Repeated in 22:17).
- b. Where/how does Scripture say this was fulfilled?

(4) **A great protection (3a)**

- a. Where/how does Scripture say this was fulfilled?

(5) **and the blessing of the nations through Abram’s seed* (3b)**

- a. Abraham will be the head of the “one family by whom all of the other families of the earth will be blessed.” In fact, the blessing of all the families of the earth is the primary purpose behind God’s calling of Abram. His calling and the promises he is given are not ends in themselves. Abram is promised offspring, a land, and personal blessing in order that he might be the mediator of God’s blessing to all the families of the earth (Repeated in 18:18b; 22:18 and then it is His seed*).
- b. Where/how does Scripture say this was fulfilled?

In the New Testament book of Acts 3:24-26, Peter speaks of his fellow Jews on the holiday of Shavuot (Pentecost): *“All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”* And then Paul demands that God spoke of one seed, who is the Christ (Gal 3:16). By the end of Genesis, and in our next lesson, we will be told that the “seed” will come through the line of Judah (Genesis 49:8-12). We will later learn that the “seed” will come from the line of David (2 Samuel 7:10-16). The identity of the line of the promised Savior continues to narrow, until the introduction of Jesus as the Messiah in the Gospels.

That’s it in a nutshell. God raised up His servant Jesus the Messiah (described in Isaiah 53) to fulfill the promises God made to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This fulfillment comes through Jesus, through whom Israel and the nations receive the blessing of atonement for sins (“turning every one of you from your wickedness”) and the knowledge of God Himself. And it all started in Genesis 12:3.