

# THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

## THE SETTING FOR THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

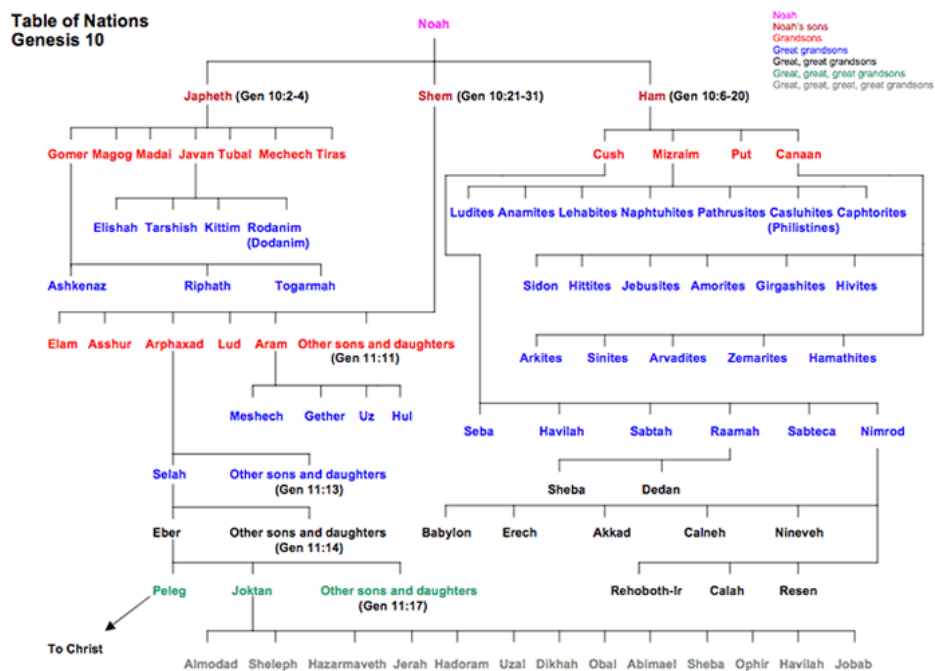
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- Genesis 1-11 sets the stage for the development of the Abrahamic Covenant (AC)
  - Genesis 1-2 detail how God the King created a wonderful world where he tasked the pinnacle of his creation, mankind, to act as his vice-regent to subdue it and rule it
  - But mankind failed in his responsibility and so God introduced a curse upon the realm he was supposed to rule over (Genesis 3)
  - Genesis 6:1-9:17 describe how God used the worldwide flood to punish mankind and to start over with another representative of mankind (Noah)
  - Genesis 9:18-29 is an important passage as it records Noah's post-flood life and moves the narrative forward through his sons
    - The world was populated by Shem, Ham, and Japheth (v. 19)
    - Noah's drunken episode resulted in him "uncovering his nakedness" (v. 21)
    - Ham sinned by seeing his father's nakedness and telling his brothers about it (v. 22)
    - The circumstances suggest that he told his brothers about it "with delight," wanting them to see their father at his worst
    - Ham's actions "expressed a long-hidden resentment of his father's authority and moral rectitude. There was apparently a carnal and rebellious bent to Ham's nature, thus far restrained by the spiritual strength and patriarchal authority of his father. Now, however, beholding the evidence of his father's human weakness before his very eyes, he rejoiced, no doubt feeling a sense of release from all the inhibitions which had until now suppressed his own desires and ambitions. Thinking that his brothers would share his satisfaction, he hastened to find them and tell them the savory news."<sup>1</sup>
    - Rather than gawking as Ham did, Shem and Japheth respectfully covered up their father, making sure not to look themselves (v. 23)
    - The difference in their reactions would have far-reaching implications for their descendants
    - Noah cursed Canaan (v. 25), the youngest son of Ham (possibly because Noah discerned that the evil that had appeared in Ham had developed to a greater degree in Canaan)
    - Here God gave Israel the permission for the conquest of Canaan much later under Joshua
    - Noah not only cursed Canaan, he blessed Shem (v. 26) as the line through whom God would choose Israel
    - Japheth would be also blessed also in that he would have many descendants and the Canaanites would serve him as well (v. 27)
  - Genesis 10 (The Table of Nations) – although a seemingly unimportant chapter, it describes the importance of nations in God's plans and sets the scene for the coming nation, Israel, and her role to the nations...it lists the nations as they descended from Noah (a horizontal genealogy), nations who were the progenitors of the various people groups and nations around the world
    - Notice how many times the following words occur in this chapter: "nations" (vv. 5, 20, 31, 32) ... "land/lands/territory" (vv. 5, 11, 19, 20, 31)... "kingdom" (v. 10)... "language" (vv. 5, 20, 31)... "families" (vv. 5, 18, 20, 31, 32)
    - Nations are those entities that involve families, languages, and land...these elements of nation, land, family, and language are echoed in the AC...thus, nations are an important part of God's kingdom purposes

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 235.

- 14 nations come from Japheth (Israel's northern neighbors), 30 come from Ham (Israel's southern and eastern neighbors and their greatest enemies), and 26 come from Shem
- The descendants from Shem are recorded last because the genealogy moves to the Seed son (vv. 21-31)
- Not all of Shem's descendants would be part of the Messianic line so the account briefly lists them to dismiss them
- This section begins by explaining that Shem is "the father of all the children of Eber" (v. 21), the great grandson of Shem through whom the Messianic line went...and from whom the "Hebrews" likely got their name
- "The Jewish people are biblically defined as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This logically means they are descendants of Shem, so are 'Semites.'"<sup>2</sup>
- "There is a recurring pattern in Genesis 10 for each of Noah's three sons. First, the sons are listed. Second, some of the grandsons are given, to explain the expansion of the nations. Third, the account ends with the settling of the clans into their nations and languages. The narrative starts with Japheth, Noah's eldest son. Then the narrative repeats the process with Noah's youngest son, Ham. Finally, we see the same with Shem's sons. The order repeats a common theme in Genesis: the narrative provides the descendants of the non-seed line to dismiss it, then concentrate on the Seed line, the one leading to the Messiah. This is Shem's line (Luke 3:36)."<sup>3</sup>

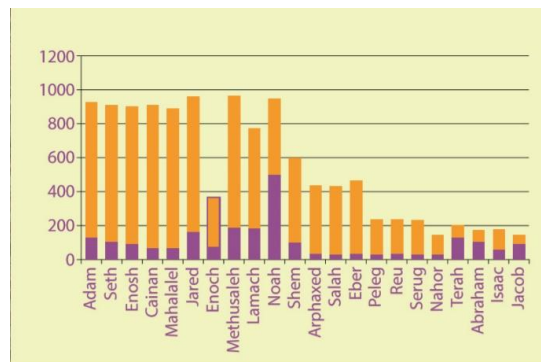


- Genesis 11 and the Tower of Babel tell us more about how the nations came to exist and mankind's continual defiance to God and his commands
  - Mankind disobeyed the command to "be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28)
  - Their pride is evident in a number of ways: 1) they wanted to build a tower to reach the heavens; 2) they wanted to make a name for themselves; 3) they did not want to be scattered over the face of the earth (Gen 11:4)
  - By confusing their language at the Tower of Babel, God forced mankind to spread out over the face of the earth

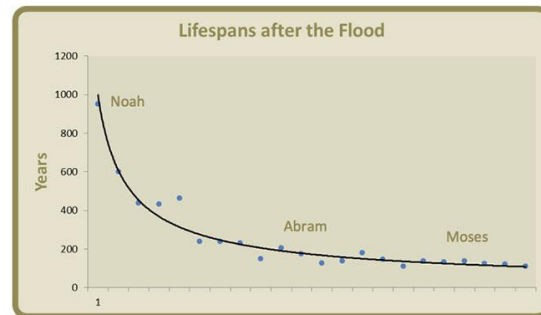
<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sarfati, *The Genesis Account*, 650.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 634.

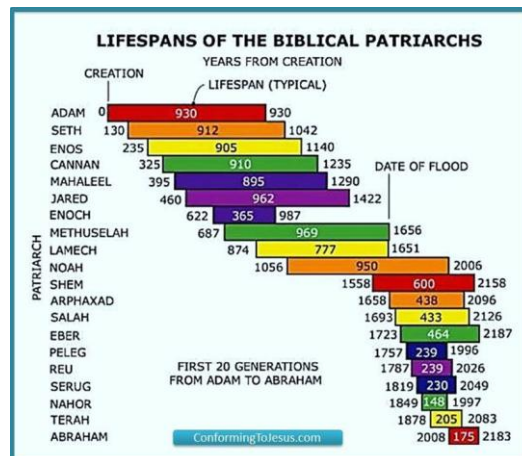
- “In this case, the account emphasizes the greatness of God and the puniness of man by comparison. Although man vainly tried to build this immensely high tower, God was still described as ‘coming down’ to see this comparatively tiny venture.”<sup>4</sup>
  - Even if the tower was tall by man’s standards, God still had to “come down”
- Genesis 11 and the genealogy of Shem mark the transition from the tower of Babel to the Abrahamic Covenant (AC)
- After giving the genealogies of the three sons of Noah in Gen 10, Moses provides the line of Shem in Gen 11:10-32, showing how the seed line progressed from Shem
  - After the segmented genealogy of Gen 10 (a horizontal one), we return to a linear genealogy (a vertical one) here, similar to Gen 5...showing a straight line from Shem to Abraham
  - One notable observation in this genealogy is the lifespans of those who lived after the flood drop steadily...those who lived prior to the flood lived about 10 times longer than people do today



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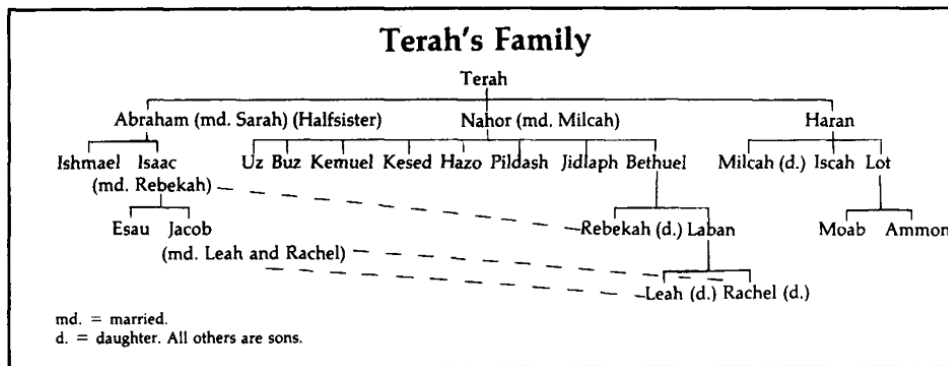


<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 660.

<sup>5</sup> <https://creation.com/living-as-long-as-methuselah>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.icr.org/article/did-adam-really-live-930-years>

- Likely the best explanation is that the decay curve is just what would be expected from accumulation of mutations
- “The Genesis lifespans decline according to a well-defined *decay curve* that began immediately after the Flood...the biological decay curve found in these biblical texts matches biological decay curves known from the science of mutation accumulation. As mutations add up after every generation, they constantly erode genetic information.”<sup>7</sup>
- Thus, the change in lifespan was probably primarily caused by genetic causes whereby mutations accumulate in cells as they divide, making them less fit
- Adam and Eve were created with no mutations...so even after the fall, the first few generations of offspring were born with very few mutations
- However, by the time of the flood numerous genetic mutations would have accumulated...this, coupled with a population bottleneck at the time of the flood, may have led to a decrease in genetic fitness
- A population bottleneck occurred when the human population was reduced from likely millions to just eight people...as a result, most of the genetic diversity from before the Flood was lost
- The new human race descended from Noah and his family, who carried all the genes that were eventually passed down to us today
- Genesis 11 closes with the line of Terah (vv. 27-32)
- These verses begin the next *toledoth* in Genesis (11:27-25:11)...the genealogy of Terah
- This genealogy is important in that it provides information on the ancestry of the 12 Tribes of Israel

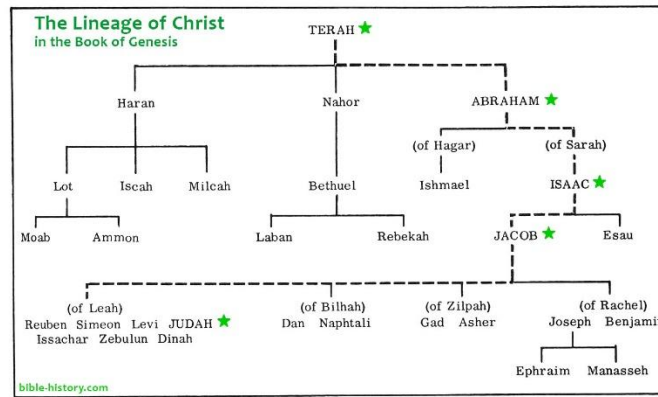


- It tells us that Haran had a son (Lot) and a daughter (Milcah)...Lot became his uncle Abram's traveling companion...Milcah married her uncle Nahor
- It also shows that Isaac's wife Rebekah was a granddaughter of Nahor...and that Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel were great-grandchildren of Nahor (and daughters of Laban)
- We know that Terah was not a follower of the true God

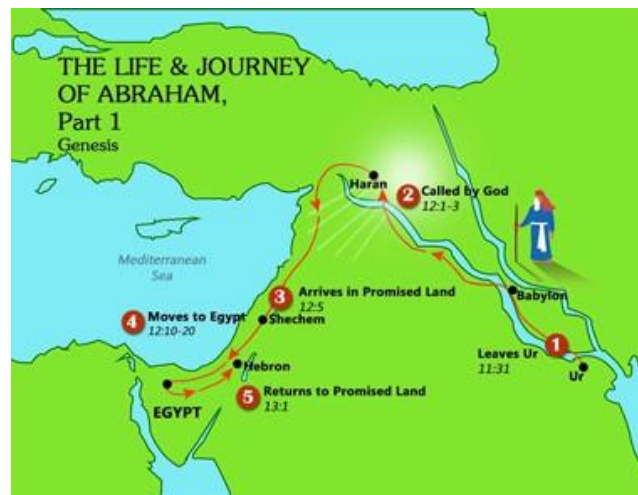
**Joshua 24:2-3** ~ Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. 3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.’”

- It seems that until God called Abram, he also shared in his father's idolatry (his salvation by faith did not come until Gen 15:6)
- The importance of this genealogy is that it demonstrates how the seed line continued from Shem to Abraham

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



- We also learn how Abram journeyed from his homeland of Ur to the Promised land, first leaving Ur with his father...then, after Terah died, leaving Haran for Palestine when God commanded him (Gen 12:1-3)

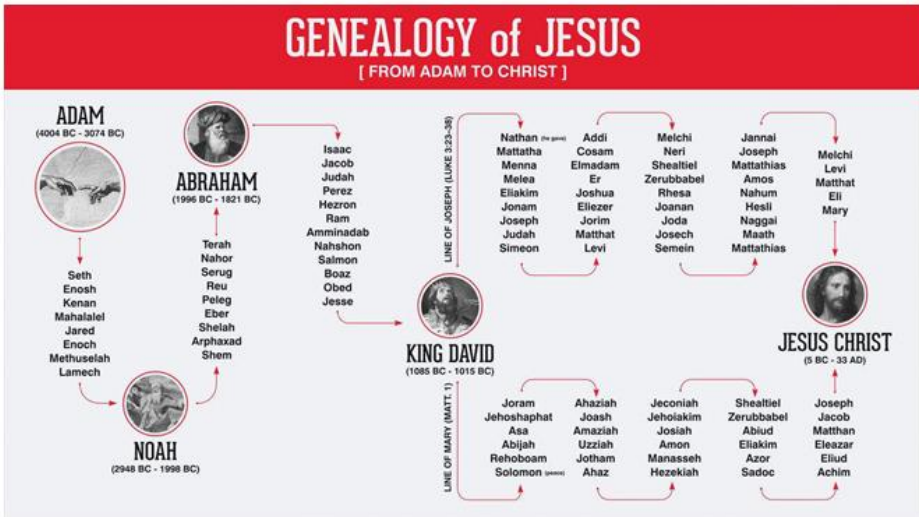
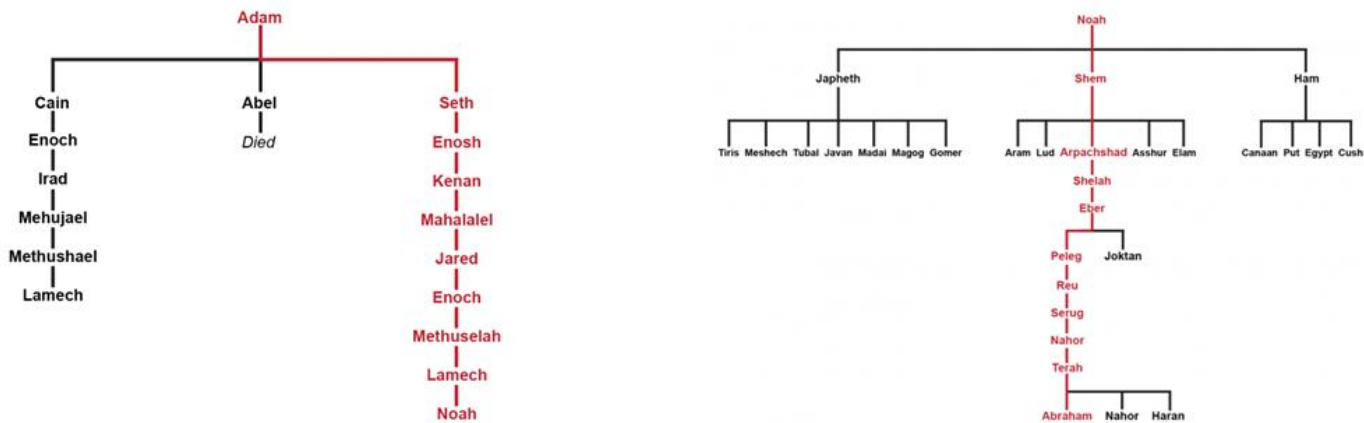


- As Genesis 1-11 closes, the sin of mankind is the major obstacle to God's kingdom program
- "This narrative provides a fitting conclusion for the primeval events. It describes the families of the earth hopelessly scattered throughout the then-known world. There was then no record of a mark for the fugitive (cf. 4:15), no rainbow in the clouds (9:13), no ray of hope or token of grace. This leaves the reader looking for a solution. After a connecting genealogy (11:10–26), that solution is provided: out of the scattered nations God formed one nation which became His channel of blessing. So God was not done with the human race. This chapter simply prepares the reader for His work."<sup>8</sup>
- All of this is a setup for the AC...after the dispersion of people at Babel, which resulted in many different languages and nations, God chose to deal with one line...the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...the line through which Messiah would come
- "The story of the tower also looks ahead by anticipating the role that Abram (12:1–3) will play in restoring the blessing to the dispersed nations. By placing the Tower of Babel incident just prior to the stories of Abram and his descendants, the biblical writer is suggesting, in the first place, that post-flood humanity is as wicked as pre-flood humanity. Rather than sending something as devastating as a flood to annihilate mankind, however, God now places His hope in a covenant with Abraham as a powerful solution to humanity's sinfulness. This problem (*Genesis 11*) and solution (*Genesis 12*) are brought into immediate

<sup>8</sup> Ross, "Genesis," In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 45.

juxtaposition, and the forcefulness of this structural move would have been lost had Genesis 10 intervened between the two.”<sup>9</sup>

- “Man, charged as the image of God to be His vice-regent on the earth, was dissatisfied with that high and holy calling and rebelled against his sovereign with the end in view of supplanting His lordship and assuming it for himself. He wanted to be like God...The divine response of this insubordination took the form of judgment (the Flood and dispersion) and covenant renewal (with Noah and with Abraham).”<sup>10</sup>
- In Genesis 12, the kingdom mandate given to Adam and Noah is now given to Abraham but with more specificity...Genesis 3:15 promised there would be a “seed” who would reverse the curse
- That “seed” line went through Noah and Shem...then God’s plan of redemption narrowed as Abraham became the vehicle for God’s kingdom purposes...that included blessing not just for Israel but the world



## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

- The AC is the “mother covenant” of God’s salvation plan
- A proper understanding of the AC is crucial for understanding God’s plans for the ages
- “The gracious promises given to Abraham in covenant appear throughout Scripture as the foundation and essential ingredients in germinal form of all subsequent salvation history”<sup>11</sup>

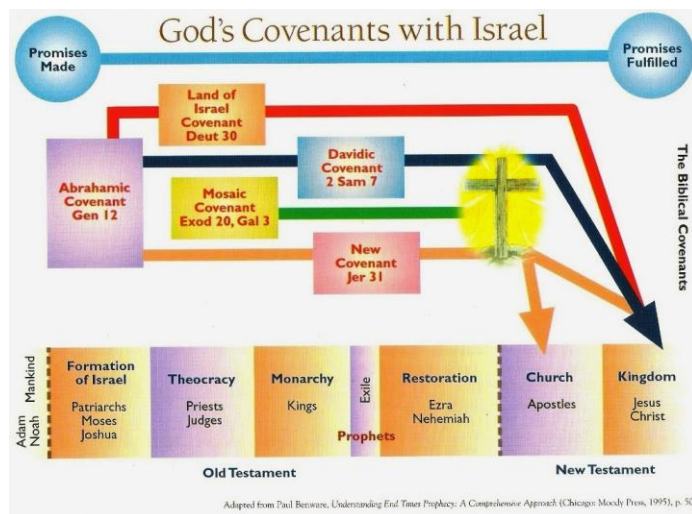
<sup>9</sup> Keith Krell, quoted in “The Order of Nations,” <https://answersingenesis.org/contradictions-in-the-bible/the-order-of-nations/>

<sup>10</sup> Roy Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 40-41.



- “The Abrahamic covenant...must be considered as the basis of the entire covenant program”<sup>12</sup>
- “It is recognized by all serious students of the Bible that the covenant with Abraham is one of the important and determinative revelations of Scripture. It furnishes the key to the entire Old Testament and reaches for its fulfillment into the New”<sup>13</sup>
- “It is this Abrahamic covenant, so explicitly set forth in Gn. xv and xvii, that underlies the whole subsequent development of God’s redemptive promise, word, and action...The redemptive grace of God in the highest and furthest reaches of its realization is the unfolding of the promise given to Abraham and therefore the unfolding of the Abrahamic covenant”<sup>14</sup>
- “The Abrahamic Covenant undergirds the totality of the biblical revelation. Specifically elucidated in Genesis, its promises govern the pattern of all that follows in Exodus to Revelation...The Scriptures, from Exodus to Revelation, continually speak of one covenant between the LORD and Abraham.”<sup>15</sup>



## THE KEY PASSAGES OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

- The Call to Separation and the Promises to Abram:

**Genesis 12:1-3** ~ 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.”

- The Ratification of the Covenant with Abram:

**Genesis 15:1-21**

- The Reiteration, Affirmation, and Sign of the AC:

**Genesis 13:14-17** ~ The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. 16 I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. 17 Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.”

<sup>12</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 70.

<sup>13</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 139.

<sup>14</sup> John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Keith Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” in *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10 (1999): 212.

## Genesis 17:1-27

**Genesis 22:15-18** ~ Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

- The Confirmation of the AC to Isaac:

**Genesis 26:3-5, 24** ~ Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws...24 The LORD appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, For the sake of My servant Abraham.”

- The Confirmation of the AC to Jacob:

**Genesis 28:13-15** ~ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

**Genesis 35:9-12** ~ Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. 10 God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name.” Thus He called him Israel. 11 God also said to him, “I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you. 12 The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you.”

## THE PROVISIONS OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

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- The foundations of the AC are found in Genesis 12:1-3

**Genesis 12:1-3** ~ 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.”

- There were 3 basic provisions made in the AC...3 parties benefit from this covenant:
  1. Abraham
  2. The nation of Israel to come from Abraham
  3. The nations of the earth (Gentile groups)

### Personal Blessings (Seed) (Babies)

- God promised Abraham personally: v. 2 ~ And I will bless you, and make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing...he would also be blessed with many physical descendants

**Genesis 13:16** ~ I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.



**Genesis 15:4-5** ~ Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” 5 And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

**Genesis 17:6** ~ I have made you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.

- Additionally, he would be the father of a multitude of nations

**Genesis 17:4-5** ~ As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you will be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.

- His name was changed from Abram (“exalted father”) to Abraham (“father of many nations”)

## National Blessings (Land) (Boundaries)

- God also promised Abraham that a “great nation” would come from him: v. 2 ~ Go...To the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation...
- The great nation of Israel would come from Abraham’s descendants, they would own the land of Canaan
- God guaranteed this great nation national existence, greatness as a nation, the land area of Canaan as an everlasting possession, and the continuation of the AC as an everlasting covenant

**Genesis 12:7** ~ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.”

**Genesis 13:14-15** ~ The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever.

**Genesis 15:18-21** ~ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”

**Genesis 17:7-8** ~ I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. 8 I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

## The Abrahamic Covenant (promise)



- Land is an important part of God’s kingdom purposes and is essential to any definition of dominion and nationhood
- The very creation of the heavens and earth was to provide a place in which the reigning purposes of God for mankind would be carried out
- Man was tasked with ruling over the earth in general and the land of the Garden of Eden in particular
- When man fell, the ground worked against him and he was expelled from the first geographical area he was called to work in
- But the fall of Adam did not remove the necessity of a geographical region as the foundation of man’s functioning
- So as God’s plans for redemption narrow on Abraham and Israel, land will be of great importance and will become the focus of God’s reigning activity on the earth

## Universal Blessings (Blessing to All People) (Blessings)

- God does not stop with blessing just Abraham and Israel...all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's physical line of descent: v. 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.
- This is the ultimate purpose of Abraham and the nation that would come from him...worldwide blessing!
- Abraham and Israel are not an end in themselves but they were to be channels of blessings
- Israel's mission is linked with the world

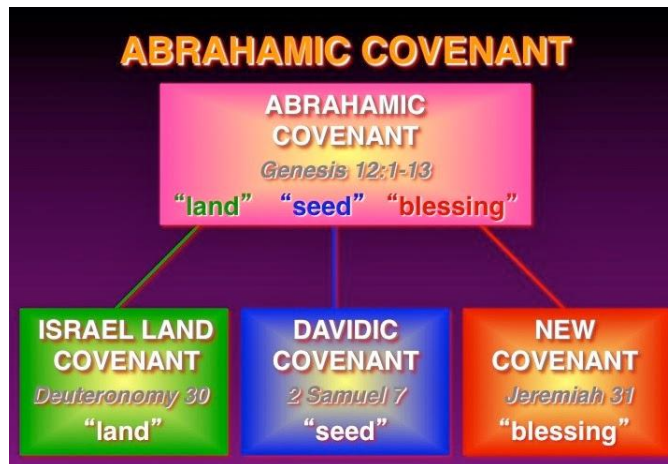
**Genesis 18:18** ~ since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?

**Genesis 22:18** ~ In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice

**Genesis 26:4** ~ I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;

**Genesis 28:14** ~ Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

- Thus, all nations would receive blessing through the physical descendants of Abraham
- "Grasping this truth of universal blessing through Israel helps with avoiding two errors. The first is thinking the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are only for Israel. The second error is assuming later Gentile participation in the covenant means Gentiles will be incorporated into Israel. Both Israel and Gentiles will be related to the Abrahamic Covenant yet each will retain their ethnic identities."<sup>16</sup>
- The relationship of the AC to the other covenants:

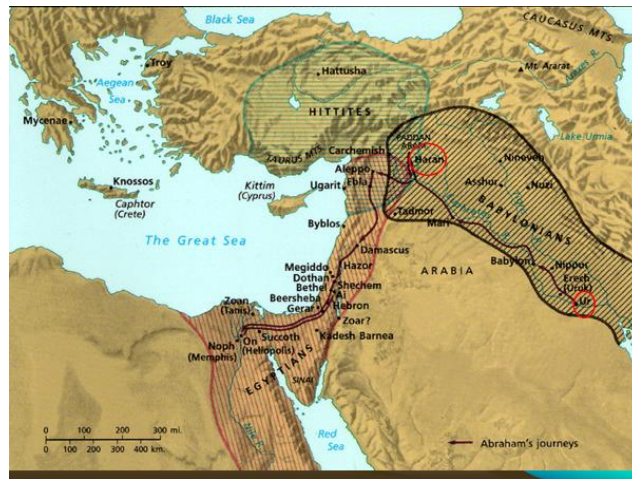


- Abraham did exactly as God commanded him

**Genesis 12:4-6** ~ So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. 6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 84.

- He packed up his family and moved from Haran to the land of Canaan
- Though Canaanites presently occupied the land, God had promised to give it to Abram and to his descendants
- Abram's obedience demonstrated his faith in God's Word



## THE RATIFICATION OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

### Genesis 15:1-21

- This passage records the actual covenant ceremony and emphasizes the “seed” and the “land”
- It is composed of 2 scenes, both of which conclude at night:
  - Scene 1 in Gen 15:1-5; emphasis is seed
  - Scene 2 in Gen 15:7-21; emphasis is land

<i>first scene</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>second scene</i>
v. 1	The LORD's Word to Abraham	v. 7
vv. 2-3	Abraham's Questioning the LORD	v. 8
vv. 4-5	The LORD's Assurance to Abraham	vv. 9-21
	v. 6, Abraham's Faith in the LORD and Consequent Righteousness	

- Notice that Abraham was saved by faith (v. 6) – see also Romans 4:3, 9, 22
- Of particular note in the ratification ceremony (vv. 7-21) is the fact that it is not a mutually binding obligation
- In that day, it was normal for both parties to walk through the cut-in-half animals to mutually agree to the covenant and thus to demonstrate what would happen to them if they broke the covenant
- But, in the case of the AC, it was only God who would enter into the covenant with Abraham...the AC did not involve any promise on Abraham's part (a unilateral covenant)
- A deep sleep falls upon Abraham and only the Lord, represented by a smoking oven and a flaming torch, passes between the animals (15:12, 17)