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VI. The Agency for Blessing: Humanity's Provision—An Overview (11:10–50:26)

- A. 11:10–37:1.** God's purposes did not end with global confusion and disunity. Instead through the chaos he preserved a righteous remnant 9 (or 10) generations from Seth to Terah, father of Abraham (11:10–11:26). More specifically, out of the 70 families/nations that sprung forth following the Tower of Babel, God set his affection on one man and his family and promised that through him the global curse would be reversed with blessing. Following the linear genealogy in 11:10–26, the narrative portions (11:27–25:11; 25:19–35:29) highlight the covenant promises of land, offspring, and blessing that God gave Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and some of the failures and victories of faith associated with them. The segmented genealogies with minimum narrative that are interspersed in the unit (25:12–18; 36:1–8; 36:9–37:1) help carry the main narrative along by filling in gaps for the reader, especially related to Israel's geo-political place in the Promised Land. Not only do they disclose where Israel's neighbors came from, they provide a lasting reminder to Israel of their mission field.

B. 37:2–50:26. This last section of Genesis details God’s purposefulness and faithfulness in preserving through further trials and character failures both the sons of Israel and the offspring promise. First, Judah’s failure to perform the right of levirate marriage with his daughter-in-law Tamar, matched with his loose sexual life, result in the preservation of Judah’s line through Tamar. Then through the sins of Joseph’s brothers, Joseph is imprisoned in Egypt, only in time to be raised to second leader of the realm. Yahweh was at work, as Joseph himself declared to his brothers: “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (50:20; cf. 45:5). The unit ends with anticipation of promise fulfillment, which it highlights in two ways: (1) through Jacob’s blessing of his sons, where the significance of the Judah–Tamar episode is clarified as Judah is elevated as the tribe through whom the future royal deliverer would come (49:8–10) and (2) through Joseph’s faith-filled request that his bones be buried in the Promised Land when God would fulfill his promise (50:24–25; cf. Josh 24:32).

VII. The Agency of Blessing, Part 1—The Line of Promise in Canaan (11:10–37:1)

A. Key Developments and Promises of the Abrahamic Covenant Materials:

1. Key developments: Abra(ha)m’s call (Gen. 12:1–9) > formalizing the covenant (15:1–21) > confirming the covenant (17:1–27) > the test of covenant loyalty (22:1–19)
2. Key promises:
 - a. General *blessing* to Patriarchs:
 - i. Abraham: Gen 12:2; 22:17; 24:1
 - ii. Sarah: 17:16
 - iii. Isaac: 25:11; 26:3, 12, 24, 29
 - iv. Jacob: 27:27–29; 28:3–4; 32:29; 48:3;
 - v. Joseph: 48:16, 20 (through Ephraim and Manasseh); 49:25–26
 - b. Descendants (Progeny)
 - i. Patriarchs into great nation:
 - (1) Abraham: Gen 12:2; 18:18
 - (2) Jacob: 35:11; 46:3
 - ii. Numerous offspring:
 - (1) Abraham: Gen 15:5; 17:2, 6; 22:17
 - (2) Isaac: 26:4, 24
 - (3) Jacob: 28:3, 14; 32:12; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4
 - (4) Joseph: 41:52; 48:16 (with Ephraim)
 - iii. Kings:
 - (1) Abraham: Gen 17:6
 - (2) Sarah: 17:16
 - (3) Rebekah: 25:23
 - (4) Jacob: 35:11
 - (5) Judah: 49:10
 - c. Land (Property):
 - i. Abraham: Gen 12:1, 7; 13:14–17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 24:7
 - ii. Isaac: 26:3–4

- iii. Jacob: 28:4, 13, 15; 31:3, 13; 35:12; 48:4 (J), 21–22 (J+Joseph)
[[fulfillment: Gen 23:17–20 (A); 33:19 (J); 48:21–22 (J+Joseph); 49:29–32 (J)]]
- d. Agent of Blessing and Curse
 - i. Bless those who bless you:
 - (1) Abraham: Gen 12:3
 - (2) Jacob: 27:29
 - ii. Curse / judge enemies:
 - (1) Abraham: Gen. 12:3
 - (2) Abraham’s offspring: **22:17b** (individual male anticipated; cf. **3:15**)
 - (3) Rebekah’s offspring: **24:60** (individual male anticipated)
 - iii. Channel of blessing to the world’s families/nations:
 - (1) “Families of the ground”
 - (a) Through Abraham: Gen 12:3
 - (b) Through Jacob and his offspring: 28:14
 - (2) “Nations of the earth”
 - (a) Through Abraham: 18:18
 - (b) Through Abraham’s offspring: **22:18** (individual male anticipated)
 - (c) Through Isaac’s offspring: 26:4
 - iv. Royal influence over many nations:
 - (1) Abraham: Gen 17:4–6
 - (2) Sarah: 17:16
 - (3) Jacob: 35:11 (cf. 48:19)
- e. Divine Presence:
 - i. Shem: Gen 9:27
 - ii. Isaac: 26:3
 - iii. Jacob: 28:15, 20; 31:3, 5, 42; 46:4
 - iv. Joseph: 39:2–3, 21, 23; 48:21

B. Divine Promise, Human Obedience, and Global Blessing in the Abrahamic Covenant (12:1–3)

1. The Setting of God’s Call and Promises to Abraham:
 - a. General:
 - i. *Mankind’s core purpose: worship and missions.* God’s original commission was that humanity would “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion” as his image-bearers, thus displaying God’s supremacy on a global scale (Gen. 1:28).
 - ii. *The problem and the hope: rebellion and curse overcome by promise.* Genesis 3 recounted a universal problem of human rebellion against God and its global impact—namely, the whole world under a curse. This is the original audience of Genesis 1—a fallen people unable to image God rightly. Hope existed, however, in the fact that the fulfillment of mankind’s purpose was framed in the context of a “blessing” (1:28), which stressed that through a dependent people God himself would accomplish such a bountiful display of his greatness.

- iii. *Two lines of descent: chosen and rejected.* Since the promise in Gen 3:15 that a male descendant of the woman would one day put a death-blow to the evil one, the reader has traced God's preservation of this hope through 10 generations from Adam to Noah and another 9 generations from Shem to Terah, father of Abra(ha)m. Lasting salvation and, by implication, the fulfillment of the great commission hinges on the offspring of promise and the male deliverer that will rise from it.
 - b. Specific.
 - i. *Messianic and missiological expectation are high by 12:1–3.* The hope of the world and the proper imaging of God are hinging on the preservation of the promised line and the coming male conqueror.
 - ii. *A new threat: offspring and land will take a miracle.* God promises the patriarch Abra(ha)m that he would become “a great nation” (12:1), that through him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:3), and that both he and his offspring would be given the Promised Land as the context for God's kingdom-building work (12:1, 7). The challenge is two-fold, stressing that both progeny and property and the global reversal of the curse would take a miracle: (1) That Abra(ha)m's wife “Sarai was barren; she had no child” (11:30) is a massive threat to the promise; all the world's hopes hinge on her pregnancy; (2) while mighty as a family, Abra(ha)m is still landless going to a place where he has no claim on any turf. How will he acquire the land?
 - iii. *The curse as a backdrop to the promises given to Abraham.* The land, offspring, and divine blessing promises in Gen 12:1–3 provide *direct responses* to the judgments issued in Gen 3:14–19 and thus show that God is at work in special way, reversing the curse (cf. James Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *TynBul* 58.2 [2007]: 253–73):
 - (1) The pain in childbirth (3:16) will give rise to a nation (12:2) from whom will come the curse-overcoming deliverer (22:17b–18);
 - (2) The cursed ground that sucks away life (3:17–19) will become the realm of a kingdom where lasting relationship with God will be enjoyed (12:7; 15:7);
 - (3) The overall curse will be reversed by blessing as God's people enjoy God's favor and thus fulfill their mission (12:3; cf. 1:28; 6:8).
- 2. General Observations from the Command-Promise Structure of Abra(ha)m's Call in Genesis 12:1–3. The ESV reads: “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

- a. The text is dominated by divine promise: nationhood, blessing, fame, agency of blessing (12:2–3). God is main mover in this text.
- b. The whole text is driven by blessing and is thus about the overcoming of the curse. The five-fold uses of *blessing* may intentionally contrast with the five *curse*s in Gen 2:4–11:9 (3:14, passive against the serpent; 3:17, passive against the ground; 4:11, passive against Cain; 5:29, active against the ground; 9:25, passive against Canaan). Up until Genesis 12, the world has experienced increased deprivation and loss. The divine blessing that is promised, therefore, suggests a reconstituting of a right relationship within the God-people-land relationship at a global scale.
- c. An overview of the two-stage manifestation of the Abrahamic covenant:
 - i. The text has two main units, each introduced by imperatives (“go” and “be a blessing”) followed by chains of *weyiqtol* verbs, which, when following command forms, usually express purpose (= “so that”).

Fig. 3.10. The Command-Promise Structure of Genesis 12:1–3

12:1a	Go to the land that I will show you (command)	
12:2a	so that I may (promise) make you into a great nation,	Offspring & Land (see Gen. 15)
b	<u>bless</u> you,	
c	and make your name great;	
d	and (there) be a <u>blessing</u> (command)	
12:3a	so that I may (promise) <u>bless</u> those who <u>bless</u> you	Divine Blessing (see Gen. 17)
b	(and the one who curses you I will curse)	
c	and so that in you all the families of the earth may be <u>blessed</u> .	

- ii. Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar* notes that when two imperatives are linked (via *waw* 'and'), “the first imperative . . . contains a condition, while the second declares the consequence which the fulfillment of the condition will involve. The imperative is used for this declaration, since the consequence is . . . intended or desired by the speaker” (GKC §110.2[a]). What is missing from this description, however, is the fact that while the second imperative is a consequence of the first, it is nevertheless a command that must be obeyed; the consequential nature does not force the loss of the imperatival force.
- iii. We see this exact same pattern in Gen 17:1–2, and there the ESV translates the text as I am proposing: “Walk before me [Impv] and be blameless [“and” + Impv], that I may make [*weyiqtol*] my covenant between me and you.” I propose that they should have translated Gen 12:1–3 in the same way. Other examples include 1 Kgs. 22:12; 2 Kgs. 5:13; Jer. 6:16; Isa. 36:16, 45:22; Amos 5:4, 6; Ps. 37:27; Job 2:9; Prov. 3:3, 4:4, 7:2; 2 Chr. 20:20).
- iv. In Gen 12:1–3, unit 1 addresses the promises of nationhood and land, whereas unit 2 addresses the promises of divine blessing. I will argue below that each of these units represents two stages in redemptive

- history—the first related to nationhood as fulfilled in the *Mosaic covenant* and the second related to global blessing as fulfilled in the *new covenant* through the promised royal deliverer.
- d. Abram is charged to “be a blessing” (Gen 12:2). The obedience to this command will flow from having received blessing from God (12:2c), and the result will be that the nations will participate in the blessing from God that he himself has enjoyed (12:3ac). His “being a blessing,” therefore, most likely points to his dependent, God-imaging, wherein by his character and behavior and witness he directs others to God, in whom ultimate blessing is found. The charge is for Abram (or the one whom he represents) to serve as a channel, conduit, or steward of grace. Having received it (12:1–2), he is commissioned to pass it on to the nations (12:3; cf. 1 Pet. 4:10).
 - e. In Gen 12:3, the initial promises of blessing and curse are matched contrastively by the reversal of word-order in the second line: Verb[x] + [x]Verb. It seems likely that the placement of the curse in the second line, along with the switch from plural ‘those’ in the blessing line to singular ‘the one’ in the curse line together highlight that blessing is the principal element in the promise. Comparably, Rom. 9:22–24 makes clear that God’s cursing is a means for highlighting his grace to those he has blessed: “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?”
 - f. The identification of Abraham’s future with *nationhood* is striking, for this geo-political term is substantially associated with Israel’s neighbors throughout the OT, whereas the more familial term *people* is more commonly used for Israel. Also significant is that in Gen. 12:3 and 28:14 (which form an inclusio or bookend around Abraham’s life), the neighbors are *not* called “nations” but “families/clans,” thus linking the mission of Israel to the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, where the world’s peoples are portrayed as spreading “each with his own language, by their *clan*, in their nations” (10:32; cf. vv. 5, 18, 20, 31). In this light, Peter Gentry has insightfully suggested, “The author’s choice of terms [between “nations” vs. “family”] emphasises that the family of Abram is a real kingdom with eternal power and significance while the so-called kingdoms of this world are of no lasting power or significance” (*Kingdom through Covenant*, 244). Abram was thus truly anticipating “the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10)—a city or kingdom unlike Babel (Babylon), for it will never be destroyed.
 - g. The climactic promise that will be realized when Abra(ha)m is a blessing is that all the world will enjoy blessing, their curse apparently being reversed (12:3). There is question regarding how best to translate the various statements regarding Abram serves as a channel of blessing.
 - i. Overview of the texts:

- (1) With the Niphal, which could be passive (“be blessed”), middle (“win/find blessing”), or reflexive (“bless themselves”):
 - Gen. 12:3 (ESV). I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth *shall be blessed*.
 - Gen. 18:18 (ESV). . . . seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth *shall be blessed* in him?
 - Gen. 28:14 (ESV). Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth *be blessed*.
 - (2) With the Hithpael, which is by nature some type of reflexive but could also be passive:
 - Gen. 22:17b–18 (ESV). . . . And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,¹⁸ and in your offspring *shall* all the nations of the earth *be blessed*, because you have obeyed my voice.
 - Gen. 26:4 (ESV). I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth *shall be blessed*,
 - Ps. 72:17 (ESV). May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people *be blessed* in him, all nations call him blessed!
 - Jer. 4:2 (ESV). and if you swear, ‘As the LORD lives,’ in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations *shall bless themselves* in him, and in him shall they glory.”
- ii. Some observations that help us discern the authorial intent behind the shifts:
- (1) The very fact that the authors of these texts had a choice to make between the Niphal and Hithpael and purposed to distinguish them suggests that there is some intentional meaning difference that is being highlighted between the texts.
 - (2) While difficult to assess whether it is significant or not, the two texts including “family of the ground” rather than “nations of the earth” both use the Niphal (Gen. 12:3; 28:14).
 - (3) P. R. Williamson has proposed that the Niphal texts imply a less direct situation wherein the one through whom the nations will enjoy blessing is Abraham or Israel in general, whereas in all the Hithpael texts the agency of blessing is more personal, whether the specific messianic, royal “seed” (Gen. 22:17b–18; 26:4; Ps. 72:17) or Yahweh himself as the decisive source of blessing (Jer. 4:2) (*Sealed with an Oath*, 80–81). This observation is likely true, so long as one recognizes the parallel structure between Gen. 22:17b–18 (cf. 26:60) and 26:4 and reads the *singular, male* “seed” into the ambiguous, contextually-determined use of “seed” in 26:4.
 - (4) W. Dumbrell argues for the middle use of the Niphal (“they will find blessing”), partly because “such a sense would also be more congruent with the general Old Testament position on mission, whereby the nations are consistently presented as seekers, coming into a reconstituted Israel” (*Creation and Covenant*, 71; followed by Williamson). However, this view does not carefully

assess the narrative context of Genesis for clues (see below), and it assumes that Israel's mission to the nations could truly be carried out without their meeting the command "be a blessing" that is highlighted in Gen. 12:2. That is, the discourse grammar of Genesis 12 suggests that the nations will only enjoy divine blessing when Abraham (and his offspring) are a blessing—something that only happens perfectly in the person of Christ. It is this redemptive-historical framework that better explains the way "missions" is seen in the Old Testament story.

Transformation did not happen on a global scale (Deut 4:5–8) because Israel was not fulfilling its God-given call to God-exalting surrender (Ps. 2).

- (5) Calling into question the use of the Niphal as middle or either the Niphal or Hithpael as a general reflexive, Chee-Chiew Lee has made the helpful contextual observation ("ברוך in Genesis 35:11 and the Abrahamic Promise of Blessing for the Nations," *JETS* 52/3 [2009] 472): "The patriarchal narrative repeatedly portrays how other people are blessed or cursed by God on account of Abraham and his descendants (examples include Abimelech, Laban, Potiphar, Pharaoh, and Egypt). Furthermore, Laban declared himself as blessed by God due to Jacob (Gen 30:27). Nowhere in the narrative do we see people actively seeking blessing for themselves by their association with Abraham or invoking his name as a formula and paradigm of blessing as a middle or direct reflexive reading would entail." Therefore, Lee concludes that the Niphal forms are just passive ("they shall be blessed") and the Hithpael forms are estimative-declarative ("they shall consider/declare themselves as blessed").¹²
 - (6) Why would all the directly messianic expressions include the Hithpael and have people "declaring themselves as blessed" in him? Perhaps the text is highlighting how all who enjoy the blessing of God will truly recognize and declare that this blessing has come *through* Christ alone. It may also relate to the confessional nature of identification with Christ, much like Paul stresses the need to "confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord" (Rom. 10:9).
3. The Two-Stage Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant
 - a. The two imperatives (Go! ... And [there] be a blessing!) suggest two stages in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant—nationhood, a name, and blessing linked with the Mosaic covenant era and blessing and curse-

¹² Cf. Benjamin Noonan ("Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Reexamination of the Niphal and Hitpael of ברוך in the Patriarchal Narratives," *Hebrew Studies* 51 [2010] 73–93), who argues that there is no evidence from other languages related to Hebrew to support the view of Keith N. Grünenberg (*Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003]) that the Hithpael of *brk* functions as a "speech action middle" meaning "utter blessing." Instead, the declarative-estimative function found in the base form, the Piel, is most natural.

overcoming related to the new covenant era. Genesis itself strongly supports this view.

- b. First, in Gen 15 Abram is promised specific geo-political turf, which is connected directly to his nationhood: “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates’” (Gen 15:18). Genesis 17 then builds upon this image by linking circumcision to the one people with whom Yahweh establishes an everlasting covenant: “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God” (17:7–8).
- i. Here the full territory of what will become Israelite sovereignty (from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates) is compared with the immediate region of Israelite occupation and kingdom (the land of Canaan). The distinction is between the suzerain-vassal realm and the specific land associate with the twelve tribes and kingdom of Israel.
 - ii. The OT signals the fulfillment of the promise of Canaan during the days of Joshua (Josh 21:43–45; cf. 11:23), but it is not until the days of David and Solomon that Israel controls the entire realm from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates River (2 Sam 7:1). Using language that alludes to the Abrahamic stage 1 promises, Yahweh tells David that during his lifetime all his enemies will be put down and he will enjoy a great name and peace (2 Sam 7:1, 9–11), then in the days of Solomon we are told that his kingdom stretched to the very reaches promised Abraham (1 Kgs 4:20–21).
 - Josh. 21:43–45. Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. ⁴⁴ And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. ⁴⁵ Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.
 - 2 Sam. 7:9–11. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.
 - 1Kings 4:20–21. Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy. ²¹ Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.
 - iii. With the territory God promised Abraham coming to realization in the days of David, the reader very well could have thought David was the one through whom the world would be blessed. However, the narrator of Samuel–Kings goes out of his way to identify that David would *not* be the ultimate serpent slayer and that someone greater than him—one

of his sons—would be the one whose throne would never end (see 2 Sam 7:12–16).

- 2 Sam. 7:12–16. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.
- c. Second, we must consider stage 2:
- i. Gen 12:2–3 make the blessing reaching the nations contingent on someone who represents Abraham being a blessing, living in accordance with God’s ways in counter to the ways of the serpent.
 - ii. The very frame of the call to “be a blessing in order that others would be blessed” gives clarity to the outworking of the earlier declaration against the serpent that an offspring of the woman would strike his head (3:15). God would overcome curse and bring blessing through a male deliverer.
 - Gen 3:15. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.
 - iii. Gen 15 opens with Abram anticipating fulfillment of this offspring promise and yet realizing his wife’s barrenness (11:30). Yahweh’s promise that Abram’s offspring would multiply like the stars (15:5) grows out of his recognition that God had not given him an individual offspring or heir (15:2–3) and out of Yahweh’s assertion that his heir would come from his own loins (15:4).
 - Gen. 15:2–5. But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” 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.”
 - iv. Gen 17 contrasts Abraham’s fatherhood of a single covenant nation (17:7–8) and the day when he will become “a father of a multitude of nations” (17:4–6). Abraham’s fatherhood of a multitude looks beyond the age of the Mosaic covenant to when those from the nations will come under the sovereignty represented by Abraham without becoming part of the single nation. Certainly Abraham’s father of a multitude of nations relates to the promise of blessing to all the families/nations of the earth in 12:3.
 - Gen. 17:4–8. Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall 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 have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I

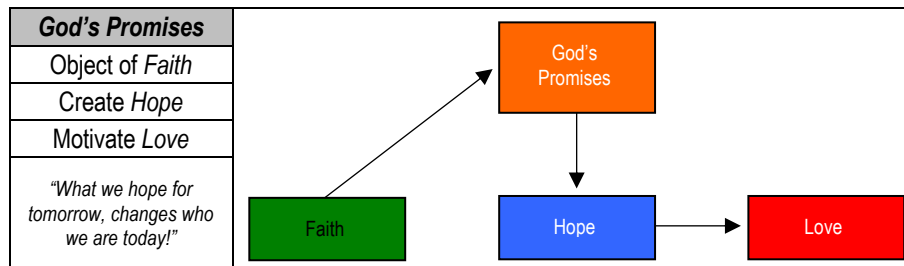
- will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.
- v. The timing and means of this shift from Abraham's fatherhood from a single nation to a multitude is then clarified in 22:17–18, where we learn that the overcoming of enemy gates and blessing reaching the nations will happen through a single, male offspring of Abraham. This shift to kingdom expansion and global blessing is further anticipated in God's promise to Isaac that the promise *land* (singular) would become *lands* (plural) in days to come (26:3–4). Only in the days of this unique offspring, whom Paul identifies as Christ (Gal 3:16), would stage 2 of the Abrahamic covenant find fulfillment and Abraham's fatherhood go global. This assumes a massive redemptive-historical shift beyond the Mosaic covenant into the new.
- Gen. 22:17–18. I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.
 - Gen. 26:3–4. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.
 - Gal. 3:16. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.
- vi. At the end of Genesis we learn that this male deliverer will be a king in the line of Judah (49:8–10). During the Mosaic covenant, Israel's hope would look ahead, and they would plant themselves on the land, awaiting the day when the royal redeemer would rise, overcome enemy gates, bring blessing to the world, and by this establish a global kingdom.
- Gen. 49:8–10. Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you.⁹ Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
- d. Two Stages or Two Covenants?
- i. Paul Williamson has argued that Genesis 15 points to a temporal, unilateral/unconditional, and national covenant, whereas Genesis 17 addresses a second eternal, bilateral/conditional, and international covenant (see *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 212–14; idem, *Sealed with an Oath*, 84–91).
 - ii. In contrast, I believe that Genesis 15 and 17 address two distinct stages in a single Abrahamic covenant.
 - (1) Both texts address "seed," "land," and God-dependence.
 - (2) Only when read together do we gain the two halves of the Gen 12:1–3 schema: *Going* to the land will result in nationhood, and *being a blessing* will overcome the curse and bless all families of the earth.

- (3) Gen 15:9–18 highlights the perpetual, binding nature of the divine promise of nationhood, which is then picked up again in 17:8 and fulfilled in the Mosaic covenant. In contrast, the call to walk with God blamelessly (17:1–2) stresses the need for Abraham’s “seed” to remain loyal to the covenant in order to ultimately generate a worldwide community under the patriarch’s fatherly headship (17:4–6, fulfilled in the new covenant through Christ).
- (4) Importantly, Gen 17:7 uses the language of God’s “establishing” his covenant, which by nature suggests a fulfillment of a previously created relationship (see the discussion of the language of covenant making in notes on the Noahic covenant). This suggests that the material in Gen 17 is building upon and organically related to the material in Gen 15, rather than distinct from it.
4. Abraham’s Enjoyment of Unconditional and Conditional Unmeritorious Grace
- a. The command-promise structure of Gen 12:1–3 suggests that the fulfillment of God’s promises were contingent on Abraham’s obedience. Ultimately, this means that the nationhood, blessing, and a great name would only be enjoyed by Abraham if he *went* to the Promised Land; and within this Land context, all the families of the earth would be blessed only if he *was a blessing*. How are we to understand the relationship of divine commitment and human responsibility in God’s covenant with Abraham? The short answer is that faith and the obedience that flows from it are God-enabled human responses to God’s covenant initiating and sustaining grace.
- b. Conditional grace in the Abrahamic Cycle:
- Gen. 12:1–3. Go forth [*divine command//human responsibility*] from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you, so that I may [*divine promise*] make you a great nation, and so that I may bless you, and so that I may make your name great. And so, be a blessing [*divine command//human responsibility*], so that I may [*divine promise*] bless those who bless you, (and the one who curses you I will curse), and so that in you all the families of the earth may be blessed. (DeRouchie’s translation)
 - Gen. 17:1–2. “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless [*human obedience*], that I may [*divine promise*] make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.”
 - Gen. 18:19. “For I have chosen [lit., known] him [Abraham], that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice [*human obedience*], so that [*divine promise*] Yahweh may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”
 - Gen. 22:1–2, 16–18. After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” . . . ¹⁶And [Yahweh] said, “By myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son [*human obedience*], ¹⁷I will [*divine promise*] surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. ¹⁸And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

- Gen. 26:2–5. And Yahweh appeared to him [Isaac] and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed [*divine promise*], because Abraham obeyed [*human obedience*] my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”
- c. The mandatory obedience of the covenant was only possible by grace.
 - i. The original blessing-commission showed that the ever-increasing display or imaging of God on a global scale would only happen as a result of divine blessing (Gen. 1:28), and Noah’s walking with God, blamelessness, and righteousness was only enjoyed as a fruit of divine favor or grace (6:8–9; cf. 8:21).
 - ii. We must consider what could have compelled an idol worshipper (Josh. 24:2) to leave all the comforts of home in Mesopotamia to follow God’s kingdom call to a foreign land. Stephen tells us that Abra(ha)m was called by “the God of glory” (Acts 7:2) into a life of radical dependence and trust overflowing in obedience.
 - iii. For Abra(ha)m, there must have been something so compelling about the promise maker and the promises that motivated him to move. That is, *the promise maker must have been fully believable and the promises truly desirable*. “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6).
 - iv. Abra(ha)m’s necessary obedience was, therefore, an obedience springing from faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26), which itself was God-generated (6:17; 12:3) through the means of his believability and the promises’ desirability. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8).
 - v. God’s relationship with Abra(ha)m would be one of divine commitment and human obligation, at the heart of which would be Abra(ha)m’s life of surrender, dependence, and faith in response to and in the hope of God’s promise and faithfulness.
 - d. Faith, hope, and love are the divinely-enabled human responses to God’s covenant initiating and sustaining grace.
 - i. God’s promises are the object of faith; God’s promises create hope; God’s promises motivate love. “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that *through them* you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet. 1:4).
 - ii. What we hope for in the future influences how we live in the present; what we hope for tomorrow, changes who we are today.

“O love that ever burnest and art never quenched! O Charity, my God, enkindle me! Though commandest continuence. *Grant what thou commandest and command what thou wilt.*”

—St. Augustine, *Confessions* (A.D. 396–430)

Fig. 3.11. The Relationship of Faith, Hope, and Love to God's Promises

5. Excursus on *Conditional Grace* and the Place of Faith (partially adapted from John Piper, "Unmerited, Conditional Future Grace," in *Future Grace*, 227–259)
- a. Conditional promises do not necessarily nullify the gracious nature of what is promised. Some imperfect parallels:
 - i. "If you are on the plane, you will go to Chicago." Explanation: We have to be on the plane to get to Chicago, but if someone else buys our ticket and carries us on, our getting to Chicago was accomplished solely by trusting the pilots and the plane to get us to our destination; we did not in any way earn or merit our trip.
 - ii. "If you graduate, I will pay off your loans." Explanation: The promise to pay was freely given, not earned, and the gracious, believable, and desirable promise would serve as motivation for your completion of school; the condition is met only by a readiness to receive (defined as being a college graduate).
 - b. While electing grace (Eph. 1:4–5; Rom. 9:11) and regenerating grace (Ezek. 36:26; 1 Cor. 1:23–24; 2 Cor. 4:4–6; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 16:14; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 2:8–9; Phil. 1:29) are *unconditional*, a number of other graces are *conditioned* on faith in Christ and love for others:
 - i. Faith is a condition for justification (John 3:16; Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24), sanctification (2 Thess. 2:13), and glorification (Col. 1:22–23).
 - ii. There are a number of other manifestations of faith as a condition, all expressions of dependence and neediness, of receiving rather than giving, of turning away from self to all that God is for us in Jesus:
 - (1) *Loving God and his Son* (Exod. 20:5–6; Ps. 119:132; Matt. 10:37; John 14:21; Rom. 8:28 contrast Matt. 7:22–23; 1 Cor. 2:9–10; 16:22; Eph. 6:24; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 2:5)
 - (2) *Humility* (Jam. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5)
 - (3) *Drawing near to God* (Jer. 29:13; 2 Chr. 30:9; Matt. 6:33; Jam. 4:8 contrast Luke 13:3)
 - (4) *Crying out for grace* (Isa. 30:19; Ps. 86:3)
 - (5) *Fearing God* (Pss. 31:19; 33:18; 34:7, 9; 61:5; 85:9; 103:11, 13; 115:13; 145:19; 147:11; Luke 1:50)
 - (6) *Delighting in God* (Ps. 37:4; cf. Neh. 1:11)
 - (7) *Hoping in God* (Ps. 31:24; 33:18, 22)
 - (8) *Taking refuge in God* (2 Sam. 22:31; Nah. 1:7; Pss. 2:12; 16:1; 31:19; 34:22; 37:39; 57:1)

- (9) *Waiting for God* (Isa. 64:4; Pss. 25:3; 37:9; 147:11; Lam. 3:25)
- (10) *Trusting in God* (Isa. 7:9; 28:16; Pss. 22:4; 32:10; 37:5; 84:12; 86:2; Prov. 3:5–6; 2 Chr. 13:18; 14:11; 20:20)
- (11) *Keeping the covenant* (Pss. 25:10; 103:17–18)
 - (a) Covenant keepers” are:
 - (i) Sinners who recognize their sinfulness and seek forgiveness from God (Ps. 25:8, 11, 18);
 - (ii) Sinners who are humble and therefore receive guidance (Ps. 25:9);
 - (iii) Sinners who keep the covenant and therefore enjoy Yahweh’s lovingkindness and truth (25:10);
 - (iv) Sinners who fear Yahweh and therefore receive his instruction (25:12);
 - (v) Sinners who take refuge in Yahweh and therefore know God’s protection (25:20);
 - (vi) Sinners who wait for God and are preserved by their “integrity and uprightness” (25:21).

Almost all future blessings of the Christian life are conditional on covenant-keeping.... I say “almost” because at the deepest root of our lives, the grace to keep us seeking God is an unconditional work of God causing us to endure to the end and be saved. When we are about to forsake the faith, the last decisive impulse that turns our hearts back to God is the ongoing keeping power of God. It is *conditional* in the sense that God is committed to do it only in those who are justified by faith. But it is *unconditional* in the sense that the ongoing pursuit of God depends ultimately on God’s keeping power, not vice versa. God has committed himself to supply the elect with the grace to seek God in prayer, which brings down the additional grace to meet the condition of faith, that brings down the additional grace to meet the condition of holiness, that brings the additional grace of final glory.

—John Piper, *Future Grace*, ch. 19, p. 248 and ch. 19, n. 2., p. 412

- (b) The new covenant is filled with warnings against those who fail to keep the covenant (Matt. 6:15; 25:31–46; Luke 6:20–26; Rom. 8:13; 11:22; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:4, 19–21; 2 Tim. 2:12; Heb. 2:3; 6:4–6; 10:26–31; 12:15; Rev. 22:19) and thus prove that they were never truly a part (1 Cor. 11:19; Heb. 3:14; 1 John 2:19).
- iii. A final group of conditions are *not* expressions of faith but are additions to faith, flowing from it and summarized in the call to love others:
 - (1) The conditions:
 - (a) The future grace of inheriting eternal life is given only to those who have “good deeds” in this life (John 5:28–29; cf. Gal. 5:21).
 - (b) Only the “doers of the law ... will be justified” (Rom. 2:13), and “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jam. 2:24).
 - (c) Only those who “love the brothers” know God and have passed into life (1 John 3:14; 4:8).
 - (d) Only those who forgive others will be forgiven by God (Matt. 6:14–15).

- (e) Without holiness, “no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).
- (2) Love for others is the essence of holiness (1 Thess. 3:12–13), the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10), and the summary of all that is required of the believer: “Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:14). It is expressed in our forgiving others (1 Cor. 13:5), and in the final judgment, our love of others will provide the *proof*, not the ground, that we have truly received the life-transforming work of Christ by faith alone.
- iv. Faith in Christ and love for others are the conditions and together make up *the commandment* (1 John 3:23). Faith and love work hand-in-hand through the new covenant (Eph. 1:5; Col. 1:4; 1 Thess. 3:6; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13; Philemon 5), the former arising first and then producing the latter: “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6) and “the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). Faith in God is the root; love for others is the fruit.
- c. In the Bible, conditional grace is still free and unmerited.
- i. It is free and unmerited because Yahweh was not obligated to make promises; they came as a gift.
- ii. It is free and unmerited because faith—trusting all God is for us in Jesus—is the primary condition that must be met, which places all focus on God and not us and “calls attention to God’s free bounty and our helpless need” (Piper, *Future Grace*, 235). “Without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6).
- iii. It is also free and unmerited because both faith and the love through which it works are ultimately gifts of God (Gen. 6:8), created by the power of God. He creates in us new desires by disclosing his believability and the desirability of the promises—“for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Knowing the promise maker and cherishing the promises are the means of grace by which God creates faith, which then produces the holiness, without which no one can see God.

2 Peter 1:3–5, 7–8. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us *his precious and very great promises*, so that *through them* you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this reason, make every effort to *supplement your faith with ... love*. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- iv. “It is possible—indeed necessary—to bank on the promises of future grace *before* we are transformed into the kind of people who love others. We do not have to perform, before faith, what faith is meant to perform” (*Future Grace*, 256).

6. Christ, the Ultimate Offspring of Abraham and Channel of Blessing to the World (see DeRouchie and Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise?” *SBJT* 14.3 [2010]: 36–48).
- a. Abra(ha)m needed to be a blessing for the world to be blessed through him: “And you shall be a blessing so that . . . in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (12:2–3).
 - b. Elsewhere in Genesis and in echo of 3:15, it is one of Abra(ha)m’s male descendants, a king born as his offspring in his likeness, who would serve as the agent of blessing to the world. The promise is passed on from Abraham to Rebekah (Isaac’s wife), to Judah (Jacob’s son).
 - Gen. 22:17b–18. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.
 - Gen. 24:60. Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!
 - Gen. 49:8, 10. Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you. . . .¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
 - c. Drawing attention away from Abraham onto his offspring enforces what the narrative shows to be true—i.e., while Abraham himself was faithful, he was not perfectly faithful, for he regularly failed to believe and obey. Therefore, neither he nor anyone else in the OT period fulfilled perfectly the call to stand counter to the curse by “being a blessing.” We must look ahead to the one whose obedience of faith will be perfect and who will in turn be the channel of blessing to the world.
 - d. The NT views Jesus as the fulfillment of these OT Messianic hopes:
 - Luke 1:68–75. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
 - Acts 3:24–26. And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.²⁵ 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.’²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”
 - Gal. 3:8, 14, 16, 29. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” . . .¹⁴ In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [has] come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. . . .¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. . . .²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.
 - e. The most foundational reason God was justified in being gracious to Abra(ha)m, a sinner, was because *Christ* would ultimately come as Abraham’s own representative; Christ would receive God’s wrath toward

Abraham, and God would impute Christ's righteousness to Abra(ha)m in light of his faith (Rom. 3:23–26).

C. The Covenant Formalized (Gen. 15)

1. Part 1: The Promise of an Heir (Offspring) (Gen. 15:1–6; cf. 3:15; 22:17b–18; 24:60)
 - a. Links with Gen 14 (Kuruvilla, *A Theological Commentary for Preachers*, 188):
 - i. The verb “go out, bring out” (Hiphil of יצא) (14:8, 17–18; 15:4–5, 7, 14)
 - ii. The noun “possessions” (רכוש) (14:11–12, 14, 21; 15:14)
 - iii. The root שלם (“peace”): “king of Salem/Peace” (14:8); “complete” (שלם) (15:16)
 - iv. The root צדק (“righteous”): “Melchizedek/King of Righteousness” (14:18); “righteousness” (צדקה)
 - v. The root מגן: “hand over” (מגן) (14:20); “shield” (מגן) (15:1)
 - vi. The notion of recompense for effort (14:22–23; 15:1).
 - b. Structure:
 - i. Yahweh's promise of protection and provision (15:1)
 - ii. Abra(ha)m's complaint and question (15:2–3)
 - iii. Yahweh's revelation and confirmation of the promise (15:4–5)
 - iv. Abra(ha)m's belief as righteousness (15:6)
 - c. The setting for the declaration of justifying faith:
 - i. In Gen 15:2–3, Abram raises two related issues that control 15:1–6 as a whole: offspring and inheritance. God's earlier promises to Abram of nationhood (Gen 12:2) and of the multiplication of his “offspring” (13:15–16) already suggested that the patriarch's “offspring” would also be the “offspring” of the woman (3:15), the one who would resolve the conflict with the serpent and the one whom Paul identifies as the Christ (Gal 3:16; 4:4). With this, the selected line of offspring in the genealogies of Genesis 5:1–42 and 11:10–32 link the choice of Abram to Adam and Eve, and this connection must inform our reading of Gen 15:1–6.
 - ii. From Gen 3:15 forward, the book directly associates the promise of a single, male “offspring” deliverer with a global problem of curse due to human rebellion, the reality of which colors every narrative that follows. Sarah's barrenness (11:30) and Abram's lack of son/heir (15:2–3) are directly related to his life under curse.
 - iii. As noted above, Gen 12:1–3 use two separate imperatives (“Go” in 12:1a; “And be a blessing” in 12:2d) to create two eras of promise associated with Abram's inheritance: stage-one included an earthly kingdom associated with one people in the promised land (12:1–2c) (fulfilled, I believe, in the Mosaic covenant); stage-two entailed a multi-ethnic, global kingdom associated with the reversal of Babel (see “families” in 10:32 and 12:3) and with God's blessing rather than curse (12:2d–3) (fulfilled ultimately in the new covenant through Christ; cf. 22:18). When Abram stresses that he has neither offspring

- nor biological heir (15:3), we must place both realities within the book's vision of global reconciliation with God.
- iv. God's renaming of Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude") reaffirms, now in paternal language, the global scope of the patriarch's future "fatherly" influence (17:4–5; cf. 12:3)—a paternal relationship over the nations that would apparently be based on election (through adoption) rather than on biology. As such, the greater context of Genesis calls us to use this broader paternal application when interpreting the book's promise that the patriarch's *offspring* would become "like the dust of the earth" (13:16; 28:14), "like the stars of heaven" (22:17; 26:4; cf. 15:5), and "like the sand of the seashore" (22:17; 32:12[13]). That is, regardless of whether one affirms Block's unlikely insistence that "all Abram had on his mind was physical progeny" (p. 34), both the divine and human author of the book would have us understand that the ultimate referent extends beyond biology and that Scripture's later allusions to the "dust-stars-sand"-promise in association with Israel as a nation ("dust" = 2 Chr 1:9; "stars" = Exod 32:13; Deut 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Chr 27:23; Neh 9:23; Heb 11:12; "sand" = 2 Sam 17:11; 1 Kgs 4:20; Isa 10:22; Heb 11:12; cf. Rom 9:27) were only initial (stage-one) fulfillments of a promise that would find broader, more world-wide realization in a multi-ethnic kingdom (stage-two) (Rom 4:18; cf. Isa 48:19; Hos 1:10).
 - v. God's declaration in Gen 15:5 addresses how the singular "offspring" will give rise to many. The last statement best translated, "Thus your seed will become," with "offspring/seed" referring back to the singular "son" and "offspring" of 15:3–4. Furthermore, we know that God would establish his covenant with Isaac (17:19, 21), but when the Lord later pledges that "through Isaac shall your offspring be named" (21:12; cf. Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18) we see that the "offspring" in view is *not* Isaac but rather a later seed who would be associated with him. While the promise demanded that Isaac survive and father offspring, the promise itself pointed beyond Isaac to another male descendant—one that Genesis 22 specifically identifies as a royal figure who would possess his enemies' gates (thus suggesting the expansion of his kingdom turf, Gen 22:17c; cf. 24:60; 26:3–4) and serve as a channel of curse-overcoming blessing to all nations (22:18).
 - vi. Within the context of Gen 22:17–8, the narrator invites us to link the anticipation of a single male descendant through whom the nations would be blessed (22:18) with the promise that Yahweh would, in allusion to Gen 15:5, multiply Abraham's offspring "as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore" (22:17b). Following the use of collective singular nouns elsewhere, Moses at times uses the number in pronouns to explicitly identify whether עַרְבָּי ("seed/offspring") bears a singular (3:15; 22:17c–18; 24:60) or plural (17:8) referent. In light of the singular in 22:17c–18, we should view the same messianic figure as the assumed agent in those ambiguous

channel-of-blessing-texts that include no pronouns (e.g., 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 28:14). In Genesis “blessing” stands in alignment with Yahweh and in direct contrast to sin and curse. The promise of global blessing is about reconciliation between God and man. Genesis portrays the decisive agent in the world’s salvation to be *not* a community but a person, not the many but the one, who will represent the nation and inherit all the promises God made to Abraham.

- d. The nature of true faith:
- i. Question: What was the object of Abra(ha)m’s faith in Genesis 15:6? Abraham was not just “believing.” He was “believing *in Yahweh.*” What was significant was not his faith but the object of his faith.
 - ii. Two elements of justifying “Faith”:
 - (1) Trusting God to accomplish in and through us what we cannot accomplish on our own.
 - (a) Sarai was barren (11:30), and the very context of the passage highlights that Abram was without a biological son as his heir (15:3–4). Not only this, God has promised that he would become a great nation (12:1–2b) and that through him the world’s curse would be overcome (12:2c–3). Nature was stacked against Abram, and the fulfillment of the promise would take a miracle; this is why Sarah laughed when the angel of Yahweh told her she would bear a son (Gen. 18:13–14).
 - (b) Biblical faith is directly related to a personal recognition that what God calls of us is *impossible without his help*.
 - Gen. 18:14. Is anything too hard for Yahweh?
 - Rom. 4:3–6, 18–22. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. ⁴Now to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. . . . ¹⁸In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²²That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness.
 - Heb 11:11. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.
 - (c) Biblical faith brings great glory to God, and by it alone can we please the One who is passionate for his own renown.
 - Rom. 14:23. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.
 - Heb. 11:6. And without faith it is impossible to please [God].
 - (2) Trusting God to bring the promised offspring through whom all evil will be demolished, the curse of sin reversed, and lasting life

with God restored through the world (cf. Gen. 12:1 with 3:15; 22:17b–18; 24:60).

- (a) While Abraham was clearly trusting in God before Genesis 15 (cf. Heb 11:8), the language of “faith/believe” is held off until Genesis 15, likely in order (1) to associate faith directly with the offspring promise and (2) to identify believing in God as the *only way*, from the perspective of absolute ground, to stand right before him.
- (b) Genesis 15:3–4 places Abra(ha)m’s faith in the context of the promise for the offspring of promise: “And Abram said, ‘Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ And behold, the word of Yahweh came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’” Abraham’s service as a channel of blessing are contingent on his having this offspring.
- (c) The stars in the sky serve as pointers to the numerous offspring promised to Abraham, each of which provides a reminder that God would indeed raise up One great star whose light would diminish all others, overcoming all darkness, and through whom the world would be blessed.
 - Gen. 15:5. Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.... So shall your offspring be.
 - Num. 24:17, 19. I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.... And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!
 - Isa. 9:2, 6. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them a light shined.... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (See Matt. 4:15–16.)
 - Isa. 49:6. It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Cf. Isa. 30:26; 42:6–7, 16; 51:4; 60:1, 3, 19, 20.)
 - John 3:19; 8:12. The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.... I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.
 - 1 John 1:5; 2:8–11. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.... ^{2:8}It is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰Whoever love his brother abides in the light, and in his there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and

- walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.
- Rev. 21:23–24. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.
 - Rev. 22:5, 16. And night will be no more. They will need no light or lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.... I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.
- (d) Because the author of Genesis withheld the use of term *faith* until the crisis of the offspring promise was most apparent (Gen. 15:6), he shows that we understand justifying faith rightly only in relation to the messianic hope.
- iii. In the life of Noah, we learned that righteousness, blamelessness, and walking with God (Gen 6:9) was all due to divine “grace” (6:8). Now we have learned that righteousness is also enjoyed through “faith” (15:6). In short, one is declared righteous by grace through faith. In Paul’s words in Eph 2:8–9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
- e. The nature of “righteousness” in Gen 15:6.
- i. Lexical overview:
- (1) There are a host of related terms associated with “righteousness” in the OT:
 - (a) *šdq* (vb): *qal*, to be right, just; *niphal*, to be justified; *piel*, to make someone appear upright, to declare as in the right; *hiphil*, to obtain rights for, to declare as in the right, to treat as right; *hithpael*, to prove oneself right
 - (b) *šedeq* (m): bears a collective meaning and points to the standard of correct or “right order” in God’s world
 - (c) *š^edāqāh* (f): denotes a proof of uprightness, an act of justice; the focus is on proper behavior that aims at right order
 - (d) *šadiyq* (adj): righteous, just, in the right, innocent
 - (2) These terms show up 43x in the Pentateuch under the following categories:
 - (a) To act properly or uprightly: Tamar (*šdq qal*, Gen 38:26)
 - Gen 38:26. Then Judah identified them and said, “She has acted rightly more than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not know her again.
 - (b) To vindicate oneself (*šdq hithpael*, Gen 44:16) or another (*šdq hiphil*, Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1).
 - (c) The description of a person’s character or behavior, at times in contrast to “wrong” action or someone who is “wicked”: Noah (*šadiyq*, Gen 6:9; 7:1); God (*šadiyq*, Exod 9:27; Deut

- 32:4); general (*ṣadiyq*, Gen 18:23–26, 28; 20:4; Exod 23:7–8; Deut 16:19; 25:1).
- Gen 6:9. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous [*ṣadiyq*] man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.
 - Gen 7:1. Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous [*ṣadiyq*] before me in this generation.”
 - Gen 18:23. Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous [*ṣadiyq*] with the wicked?”
 - Gen 20:4. Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, “Lord, will you kill an innocent [*ṣadiyq*] people?”
 - Exod 9:7. Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the LORD is the right [*hasṣadiyq*] (one), and I and my people are the wrong (ones).”
 - Exod 23:8–9[7–8]. Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous [*ṣadiyq*], for I will not acquit the wicked.⁸ And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right [pl of *ṣadiyq*].
 - Deut 16:19. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous [*ṣadiyq*].
 - Deut 25:1–2. If there is a dispute between men and they come into court and the judges decide between them, acquitting the innocent [*hasṣadiyq*] and condemning the guilty,² then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence with a number of stripes in proportion to his offense.
 - Deut 32:4. The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just [*ṣadiyq*] and upright is he.
- (d) Part of a proper name that highlights a life aligned with right order: Melchizedek (*ṣedeq*, Gen 14:18).
- (e) The correct, accurate, ordered context in which courts are to judge (*ṣedeq*, Lev 19:15; Deut 1:16; 16:18, 20), in which weights and measures in commerce are to be applied (Lev 19:36; Deut 25:15), and in which sacrifices will be made (Deut 33:19).
- Lev 19:15. You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness [*ṣedeq*] shall you judge your neighbor.
 - Lev 19:36. There shall be to you balances of righteousness [*ṣedeq*], weights of righteousness [*ṣedeq*], an ephah of righteousness [*ṣedeq*], and a hin of righteousness [*ṣedeq*]: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.
 - Deut 1:16. And I charged your judges at that time, “Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge with righteousness [*ṣedeq*] between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him.”
 - Deut 16:18, 20. You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with a judgment of righteousness [*ṣedeq*]. . . .²⁰ Righteousness, righteousness [*ṣedeq*]

you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

- Deut 25:15. A whole weight—even righteousness [*sedeq*] (i.e., a full and fair weight) there shall be to you; a whole measure—even righteousness [*sedeq*] (i.e., a full and fair measure) there shall be to you—that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.
 - Deut 33:19. They shall call peoples to their mountain; there they offer sacrifices of righteousness [*sedeq*]; for they draw from the abundance of the seas and the hidden treasures of the sand.
- (f) Proper or upright behavior that is expected or performed, often explicitly in association with Yahweh (*s^edāqāh*, Gen 18:19; 30:33; Deut 6:25; 9:4–6; 24:13; 33:21).
- Gen 18:19. For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness [*s^edāqāh*] and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.
 - Gen 30:33. So my honesty [*s^edāqāh*] will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen.
 - Deut 6:25. And it will be righteousness [*s^edāqāh*] for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.
 - Deut 9:4–6. Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, “It is because of my righteousness [*s^edāqāh*] that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,” whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. ⁵ Not because of your righteousness [*s^edāqāh*] or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. ⁶ Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness [*s^edāqāh*], for you are a stubborn people.
 - Deut 24:13. You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness [*s^edāqāh*] for you before the LORD your God.
 - Deut 33:21. He chose the best of the land for himself, for there a commander’s portion was reserved; and he came with the heads of the people, with Israel he executed the righteousness [*s^edāqāh*] of the LORD, and his judgments for Israel.
- (g) An act of proper behavior that God imputes to one who believes in him (*s^edāqāh*, Gen 15:6).
- Gen 15:6. And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

ii. Synthesis, definition, and significance:

- (1) Within the Pentateuch, *all* 43 instances of “righteousness” language *except in Gen 15:6* speak of aligning with or doing what is right in God’s world. It is about the orientation of one’s

life with right order through *character and behavior*.

Righteousness is about doing, and because of this many have associate “righteousness” with covenant loyalty. Note the following definitions:

- (a) M. Seifrid – “In biblical thought, ‘righteousness’ is simultaneously moral and creational, having to do with God’s re-establishing ‘right order’ in the fallen world which he has made, an order which includes a right relationship between the world and its Creator” (“Righteousness, Justice, and Justification,” in *NDBT*, 741)
 - (b) W. VanGemeren – “Righteousness is the order that characterizes God’s rule over creation through his acts (blessing, lavish gifts, generosity) and brings harmony, peace, and joy. Justice, as it relates to God, is the aspect of righteousness that pertains to his wise and fair judgments.” (*Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 132)
 - (c) D. I. Block – “‘Righteousness’ (*šēdāqā*) denotes behavior that conforms to norms established in the stipulations of Yahweh’s covenant (cf. [Deut] 33:21)” (*Deuteronomy*, 196).
 - (d) J. Piper – “The righteousness of God consists most basically in God’s unswerving commitment to preserve the honor of his name and display his glory. . . . The basic implication as I see it is that man’s righteousness will be seen now as radically God-centered. . . . The righteousness of man in relation to God is (reflecting God’s righteousness) to love the honor of God’s name, to esteem above all things God’s glory (especially as it has been mercifully experienced in his saving deeds), and, finally, to do only those things which accord with this love and esteem. Thus human actions may be described as righteous not because they conform to an ‘ideal ethical norm’ . . . , but rather because they are fitting expressions of man’s complete allegiance to maintain the honor of God’s name and display his glory.” (*The Justification of God*, 119)
- (2) The term in Gen 15:6 rendered “counted” in the ESV (Hebrew *ḥšb* qal; Greek *logizomai*) is associated with a mathematical process of reckoning, counting, or imputing. In Scripture you can reckon something for what it is or for what it is not.
- (a) Phinehas’ zeal against the sexually immoral was “counted” righteousness—i.e., identified *for what it was*, namely a righteous act: “Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed.³¹ And that was counted to him as righteousness [*wattēḥāšēḇ lô lišdāqāh*] from generation to generation forever” (Ps 106:30–31).

- (b) However, one can also reckon something *for what it is not*, and this is what is going on with Abra(ha)m. The very essence of biblical faith is the recognition that one cannot do, and when Abra(ha)m’s believing in God is regarded as righteousness, God imputes to him something that is not by nature his own: “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness [wayyahš^ebehā lô š^edāqāh]” (Gen 15:6).
- (c) A similar counting for what something is not is seen in Prov 27:14: “Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.” A blessing is not cursing, but in a certain context it can be regarded as such.
- (d) Brian Vickers writes, “The status or description typically reserved for actions is here counted to Abraham on the basis of faith. Abraham’s faith is counted to him as something that it inherently is not, righteousness. . . . What might usually be declared over a person who did what is right in God’s sight is declared upon Abraham through faith” (*Justification by Grace through Faith*, 60–61). Similarly, Vickers earlier writes, “When Abraham’s faith in the Lord is counted to him as righteousness, it means that God sees Abraham as someone who has fulfilled his (God’s) standard of what it means to be righteous. He is deemed a righteous person. Here, however, it is not Abraham’s behavior or actions that constitute his righteousness but his faith in God. . . . Because Abraham believes the promise for an heir, God counts Abraham as holding the same status or position as that of a person who has done everything right according to God’s standards” (58).
- (e) Similarly, Paul writes of Abraham (Rom 4:2–5): “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness [kai elogisthē autō eis dikaiosynēn].’ ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”
- (3) While the “righteousness” of Gen 15:6 appears to bear the same basic meaning as anywhere else in the Pentateuch (i.e., character or behavior aligning with God’s right order), in Gen 15:6 faith and not works are counted righteousness. Thus Abraham receives from God by declaration what he did *not* have in himself.

iii. Genesis 15:6 within its biblical context.

- (1) The law describes “righteousness” and makes life and blessing contingent upon it (e.g., Gen 18:19; Deut 6:25; 16:20).
 - Gen 18:19. For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”
 - Deut 6:25. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.
 - Deut 16:20. Righteousness, righteousness you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.
- (2) Nevertheless, although the OT gives some examples of real (though imperfect) right living among the remnant (e.g., Noah, Gen 6:9; Phinehas, Ps 106:31; David, 2 Sam 22:21), the Pentateuch’s overwhelming message is that God’s people are not and indeed cannot be perfectly righteous. Their innate stubbornness and uncircumcised hearts render them unrighteous and spiritually disabled (Deut 9:4–6; cf. 10:16; 29:4[3]). They are, in Paul’s words, “ungodly” (Rom 4:5; cf. 4:7–8).
 - Deut 9:6. Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.
 - Deut 10:16. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.
 - Deut. 29:4. But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.
 - Rom 4:5. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.
- (3) Moses asserted, “Righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue [LXX: *dikaiōs to dikaion diōxē*], that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Deut 16:20). Nevertheless, Israel could not reach this goal. Thus Paul says, “What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness [*ta mē diōkonta dikaiosynēn*] have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law of righteousness [*diōkōn nomon dikaiosynēs*] did not succeed in reaching that law.³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works” (Rom 9:30–32).
- (4) The ultimate *telos* of the law-covenant was Christ for righteousness to all who believe (Rom 10:4). The law was intended to disclose and multiply sin (Rom 3:20; 5:20; Gal 3:19), so as to show everyone their need to receive from God by declaration the right standing that no one could himself earn.
 - Rom 10:4. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
 - Rom 3:20. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
 - Rom 5:20. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

- Gal. 3:19. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.
- (5) There is a confluence of images in Deuteronomy that together highlight that only in the new covenant will righteousness be secured for the many.
- (a) Israel's lack of righteousness is equated with their being stubborn and rebellious and having uncircumcised hearts (Deut 9:6–7; 10:16).
- Deut 9:6–7. Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. ⁷ Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.
 - Deut 10:16. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.
- (b) When God circumcises Israel's hearts, he will empower them to love with the result that they will live (Deut 30:6). By the Spirit they will keep the statutes and rules (Ezek 36:27), which implies that they will be enabled to walk in righteousness.
- Deut 30:6. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.
 - Ezek 36:27. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.
- (6) The NT teaches that God imputes our sin to Christ and his perfect righteousness to us (Rom 5:18–19; 8:3–4; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:8–9) and that out of this context of reconciled right relationship with God (justification/no condemnation) we are empowered by the Spirit of Christ in us to do righteous deeds (Rom 8:13; 1 John 3:7), keeping the law's "statutes/just requirements" (Rom 2:26) and fulfilling the law of love (Rom 13:8, 10)—not perfectly overnight but truly and progressively over a life time. Our righteous deeds will serve as evidence in the future that Christ has indeed transformed us (Rom 2:13); because we are truly alive in Christ we will produce fruit of holiness, without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:13). On this, Vickers writes: "On the last day, the final verdict of "righteous" will be declared publicly upon exactly the kind of people God said would inherit the promise—the same declaration now had by faith. The ground of that declaration will be faith in Christ (the root), and the evidence to vindicate God's declaration as true (as with Abraham, cf. Rom. 4) will be the obedience (the fruit) that is in keeping with membership in the new covenant" (159).
- Rom 5:18–19. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For

as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

- Rom 8:3-4. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- 2 Cor. 5:21. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- Phil 3:8-9. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ Phil. 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.
- Rom 8:13. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
- 1 John 3:7. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.
- Rom 2:26. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?
- Rom 13:8, 10. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. . . . ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.
- Rom 2:13. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.
- Heb 12:13. and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

(7) Before we can ever engage in God-honoring deeds of righteousness we must be counted righteous by faith. We pursue righteousness confident that God is *already* 100% for us and that our right standing is secure *because* of what Christ has already accomplished on our behalf.

f. Conclusion:

- i. Abra(ha)m could not produce an heir on his own, so he trusted God to fulfill his promise. The patriarch did not work but believed, and his faith in God was counted for it wasn't—righteousness. Abraham's life of God-saturated dependence provides an example for Christian faith and contrasts with the majority of old covenant community who pursued law-keeping without an inner sense of desperation and inability. The Mosaic law, therefore, became for them an instrument of works-righteousness, whereas for the remnant obedience to the law stood as a fruit of the righteousness they already had declared over them by faith.
- ii. Vickers writes, "Obedience, doing 'justice and righteousness,' is a necessary part of being the people of God. . . . Justification is verdict that through the work of God in Christ we stand before him without guilt and as having done all matters of obedience—we are declared righteous by God" *Justification by Grace through Faith*, 67, 74). Vickers also notes, "Ultimately what we see is that God will create the kind of people he wants by giving them his Spirit" (67). Paul presents

Abraham as the model not only of one who is justified by faith (Rom 4:1–12) but also of the just one who lives by faith (4:18–25).

Abraham’s persevering and increasing faith was like evidence in a courtroom that God’s initial declaration was true (90). Nevertheless, “Abraham’s faith was counted as righteousness *before*, and not on the basis of, the evidence shown in his life. . . . God . . . knows the confirming evidence that will flow from faith, but the declaration of justification is founded in Christ alone, the object of faith” (90).

2. Part 2: The Promise of Land in Which to Enjoy Nationhood (15:7–21)
 - a. Structure:
 - i. Yahweh’s reminder of past provision and promise of land (15:7; cf. Exod. 20:2)
 - ii. Abraham’s question (15:8)
 - iii. Yahweh’s revelation and confirmation of the promise of land (15:9–17)
 - iv. Yahweh’s covenant with Abra(ha)m formalized (15:18–21)
 - b. An overview of the covenant-formalizing ceremony:
 - i. *The purpose:* to give Abra(ha)m absolute confidence that God would fulfill his promise of land to the patriarch and his offspring (15:7).
 - ii. *The nature:*
 - (1) A number of animals (a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon) are all split in two and separated so that an aisle is created between the parts (15:9–11).
 - (2) While Abra(ha)m sleeps, there is a vision of “a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch” that passes between the pieces (15:12–17). For the original readers, this imagery would likely have been reminiscent of the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night and thus would have been identified with Yahweh’s glory presence.
 - (3) By means of the divine journey through the pieces, “Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram” (15:18), thus granting him unswerving confidence in God’s commitment to establish Abra(ha)m’s offspring in the land (15:19) and with that to use Israel as the instrument through which the world’s curse would be reversed.
 - c. The significance of the ceremony:
 - i. Biblical parallels suggest that, by going through the parts, God was declaring, “Let happen to me what happened to these animals, if I fail to keep my pledge.”
 - (1) Genesis 21 supplies an example of how ancient Near Eastern treaties worked. Here Abraham and Abimelech enter into a treaty, which the biblical text terms a “covenant.” In v. 27 we read, “So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant.” The verb for “making” a covenant is the Hebrew כָּרַת, meaning “to cut.” Implied here may be the same cutting ritual testified to in Genesis 15.

- (2) In Deuteronomy 21:4–8, following the discovery of a murdered victim in a field, the elders of the nearest city must break the neck of an undefiled heifer and then swear an oath before God that they did not commit the treachery. They appear to be declaring, “Let happen to me what happened to this animal if I lie before you.” By this act, the Lord atoned for the sins of the people.
- Deut 21:1–9. If in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess someone is found slain, lying in the open country, and it is not known who killed him, ² then your elders and your judges shall come out, and they shall measure the distance to the surrounding cities. ³ And the elders of the city that is nearest to the slain man shall take a heifer that has never been worked and that has not pulled in a yoke. ⁴ And the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and shall break the heifer’s neck there in the valley. ⁵ Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to him and to bless in the name of the LORD, and by their word every dispute and every assault shall be settled. ⁶ And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, ⁷ and they shall testify, “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it shed. ⁸ Accept atonement, O LORD, for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, and do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel, so that their blood guilt be atoned for.” ⁹ So you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD.
- (3) The clearest parallel with the imagery of Genesis 15 is found in Jeremiah 34:18–20. Here the Judean lords committed before Yahweh to let their fellow Judean slaves go but then reneged on their promise. God declares that they passed between the slain animal pieces and by this portrayed the curse they would endure if they failed to keep their oath. God is now holding them accountable.
- Jer. 34:18–20. And 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—¹⁹the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf. ²⁰And I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.
- (4) Another parallel is Ps 50:5, where the Lord declares, “Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!” We don’t know what event the psalmist is referring to, but it elicits the same imagery as Jer 34:18–20.
- ii. In Genesis 15, Yahweh himself (the covenant suzerain) made the journey through the slain pieces. By this act he was declaring an impossibility—“Let happen to me what happened to these animals if I fail to keep my oath.” The imagery suggests that God’s promise to Abra(ha)m was as sure as God’s lasting nature. Because he could never stop being God, the promise would most definitely be fulfilled!

- iii. God's promise in Genesis 15 was lastingly perpetual without qualification. How does this relate to the conditions already apparent in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1–3; 17:1–2; 18:19; 22:16, 18; 26:5)?
- d. Ancient Near Eastern Support for a Perpetual yet Conditional Abrahamic Covenant:
 - i. Of the two kinds of ANE treaties, the royal appears to stand in the background to the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15:
 - (1) *Suzerain-Vassal Treaty*: A relationship of obligation established under divine sanction; the suzerain claimed absolute right of sovereignty and promised provision and protection in return for the vassal's loyalty and exclusive reliance on the suzerain's protection.
 - (2) *Royal Grant*: Added promises of provision (land or dynasty) from a suzerain to a loyal vassal, provided perpetually for the family without qualification but provided conditionally for each individual in the family given they stay loyal within the covenant. The royal grant made a suzerain-vassal treaty perpetually binding.
 - ii. Covenant Ratification in the Ancient World
 - (1) Oaths and Oath-signs in ancient covenant ratification
 - (a) The *oath* was a vow to covenant loyalty.
 - (b) The *oath sign* symbolized this vow by graphically involving the covenant party (usually the vassal) in a picture of either the covenant blessings or curses.
 - (i) Sex in the marriage covenant (Gen. 2:24) and the fellowship meal on Sinai in the Mosaic covenant (Exod. 24:9–11) appear to be oath signs symbolically portraying the blessing of covenant fellowship. Similarly, the rainbow "sign" in the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9:12–16) portrays the blessing of covenantal protection.
 - (ii) Circumcision (Gen. 17:11) and the divine presence-cutting ritual (15:17) in the Abrahamic covenant appear to serve as oath signs portraying the curse of covenant excision.
 - (2) The cutting of animals and the suzerain's vow in a land grant bestowed from Abban, king of Yamhad, to his vassal Yarim-Lim.
 - (a) The setting: In response to an act of treason, Abban had destroyed Irridi, a city that once belonged to Yarim-Lim. On the suzerain's return home, he resolved to grant Yarim-Lim the cities of Alalah and Murar in place of Irridi.
 - (b) The oath: "Abban placed himself under oath to Yarim-Lim and had cut the neck of a sheep saying: '[Let me so die] if I take back that which I gave thee!'" (D. J. Wiseman, "Abban and Alalah," 129)

- iii. Grants as Perpetual and Conditional:
- (1) The promises were perpetually preserved in the family line without qualification, but every generation could forfeit its participation in the promise through lack of covenant loyalty.
 - (2) ANE examples:
 - (a) The Grant of royal succession and land in a treaty between Hattusilis III of Hatti and Ulmi-Teshshup of Tarhuntassa: “I, My Majesty, will [not depose] your son. [I will accept] neither your brother nor anyone else. Later your son and grandson will hold [the land] which I have given [to you]. It may not be taken away from him. If any son or grandson of yours commits an offense, then the King of Hatti shall question him. And if an offense is proven against him, then the King of Hatti shall treat him as he pleases. If he is deserving of death, he shall perish, but his household and land shall not be taken from him and given to the progeny of another. Only someone of the progeny of Ulmi-Teshshup shall take them.” (G. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 2nd ed., 109).
 - (b) Property Grant: “Nobody in the future shall take away this house from Umanava, her children, her grandchildren and her offspring. When anyone of the descendants of Umanava provokes the anger of the kings ... whether he is to be forgiven or whether he is to be killed, one will treat him according to the wish of his master but his house they will not take away, and they will not give it to somebody else.” (M. Weinfeld, “Covenant of Grant,” 189–90)
 - (3) God’s covenant with David
 - (a) Both 2 Samuel 7:8–16 and Psalm 89:30–37 stress how God’s dynastic grant to David is perpetual, unconditioned on the faithfulness of his heirs.
 - 2 Sam. 7:13–16. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him...your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.
 - Ps. 89:30–37. If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules,³¹ if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,³² then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,³³ but I will not remove from my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.³⁵ Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.³⁷ Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.
 - (b) Nevertheless, biblical commentary on the Davidic Covenant shows that the original readers knew that the covenants

included conditions and that any given generation could forfeit his privilege to the throne (see e.g., 1 Kgs. 2:4; 8:25; Psa. 132:12). As stated in 1 Kings 9:4–5: “And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, [if] and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’”

iv. **Conclusions Regarding the Perpetual Conditional Unmeritorious Abrahamic Covenant**

- (1) In Genesis 15, Yahweh is committing himself to Abraham that the divine kingdom promise of offspring in the land will be fulfilled. God will do it! He will make it happen! In this sense, it is an unconditional, perpetual promise!
- (2) Nevertheless, for individual offspring of Abraham to enjoy participation in the promise fulfillment, they must remain loyal to God (the point of Genesis 17), which is defined as faith overflowing in obedience.
- (3) In Gal 3:17–18, Paul asserts: “This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.¹⁸ For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.” By “law” Paul here refers directly to the Mosaic covenant. His contrast of “law” with “promise” does not mean the covenant with Abraham included no conditions, but it does suggest that the covenant itself bore a promisory nature—a fact made clear through the land/dynastic grant form.

D. Confirming the Covenant: Circumcision (Gen. 17)

1. Structure:

[Yahweh’s appearance – 17:1]

- a. Part 1 (17:2–8): God’s promises to Abraham (“As for me”)
 - i. Yahweh’s intention to confirm his promise about descendants, ultimately to be a channel of blessing to the nations (17:1–2)
 - ii. Abram’s prostration (v. 3)
 - iii. Divine promises of (1) covenantal influence among the nations, (2) descendants, (3) the land, and (4) perpetual special relationship (vv. 4–8).
- b. Part 2 (17:9–14) Abraham’s responsibility: the sign of circumcision given (“As for you”)
- c. Part 3 (17:15–21) God’s promises to Sarah (“As for Sarah”)
 - i. Yahweh’s intention to bless Sarah with offspring (vv. 15–16)
 - ii. Abraham’s prostration & comment (vv. 17–18)
 - iii. Divine promise of a son & offspring to Sarah (vv. 19–22)

[Yahweh’s departure – 17:22]

- d. Part 4 (17:22–27) Abraham’s obedience: the sign of circumcision practiced
2. Excursus: the Meaning of Circumcision in the Abrahamic Covenant (see DeRouchie, “Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and the Targums: Theology, Rhetoric, and the Handling of Metaphor,” *BBR* 14.2 [2004]: 175–203):
- a. Terminology: The rite is designated a “covenant” (*b#r^a*) and a “sign of covenant” (<*ô[®]* *b#r^a*) between God, Abraham, and his offspring (Gen. 17:10–11, 13).
 - b. “Signs” (<*ô[®]*) in the Hebrew Old Testament
 - i. They fulfill at least one of three functions (so M. V. Fox, “The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Light of the Priestly <*ô[®]* Etiologies.” *RB* 81 [1974] 562–63):
 - (1) To prove the truth of something (e.g., Isa. 38:7–8);
 - (2) To symbolize or represent a future reality by virtue of resemblance or conventional association (e.g., Ezek. 4:1–3);
 - (3) To rouse knowledge of something, whether by (i) identifying (e.g., Josh. 2:12) or (ii) reminding (Exod. 13:9).
 - ii. While circumcision’s function is not made explicit in Genesis 17, a number of observations suggest that in Israel the rite served primarily as a mnemonic cognition sign (#c.ii) and secondarily as both a symbol sign (#b) and an identity cognition sign (#c.i).
 - c. Circumcision as a Cognition Sign
 - i. Fox observes that all but one of the other “signs” in the Pentateuch’s priestly material is cognition oriented, which suggests circumcision functions similarly:
 - (1) Example 1: The blood of the Passover lamb was a sign that identified the Israelite homes to the messenger of Yahweh (Exod. 12:13).
 - (2) Example 2: Aaron’s blossomed rod was a sign that reminded the community of the divine choice of the Aaronides (Exod. 17:10; cf. 17:5).
 - ii. The close parallels between circumcision and the signs of the rainbow (Gen. 9:13–17) and the Sabbath (Exod. 31:13–17) help clarify that the principle purpose of this knowledge was to help *remind* the covenant parties of their obligations.
 - (1) In the Hebrew Bible, only the “signs” of the rainbow, circumcision, and the Sabbath are linked directly to *b#r^a* (“covenant”).
 - (2) Each of these covenant “signs” is also denoted by the verb *n[®]n* (“to give, confirm, make”) and qualified by the phrase “between me and you” (cf. Gen. 9:12, 13; 17:2, 10, 11; Ezek. 20:12 with Exod. 16:29).
 - iii. Because the rite was performed “in the flesh” of the male covenant member (Gen. 17:11, 13–14) and because human failure to observe circumcision would result in being cut-off from the community (17:14), circumcision appears to function as a reminder primarily to Abraham and his offspring rather than to God.

- (1) Specifically, the sign reminded the human parties of Yahweh's demand to "walk before me and (so) be blameless" (Gen 17:1).
 - (2) The rite was performed on the male reproductive organ to remind the recipient that the oath of undefiled allegiance was binding on both him and his offspring (cf. Gen 18:19) and perhaps also to remind both covenant parties of the divine promise of posterity (e.g., 12:2; 15:5; 17:4–5, 19; 18:10).
- d. Circumcision as a Symbolic Sign
- i. The fact that circumcision was a cutting rite suggests that it also bore a symbolic function.
 - ii. Like the dismembering ritual in Gen. 15:7–18 (cf. Jer. 34:17–20), circumcision may have graphically portrayed the covenant curse of excision and threatened the cutting off of descendants (Gen. 17:14) (so M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* [So. Hamilton, MA: Meredith G. Kline, 1993], 193).
- e. Circumcision as an Identity Sign
- i. Circumcision appears to have distinguished those who were incorporated into Israel's covenant community from her neighbors (Gen. 17:12–13).
 - ii. We know that many of Israel's neighbors practiced a form of circumcision. But the combination of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence suggests that from the Middle Bronze Age (2000 B.C.) through the early Roman Period (A.D. 125)—the time roughly associated with biblical Israel, Israel alone amputated the foreskin (see DeRouchie, "Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and Targums," 186–189). Israel's full removal of the prepuce thus set them apart from the Egyptians and many of her West Semitic neighbors (cf. Jer. 9:25–26) who performed the rite only by slitting the foreskin, from the "uncircumcised" Philistines and the East Semites of Mesopotamia who apparently had nothing to do with the ritual, and from the Greeks and Romans of the Intertestamental and NT periods who were repulsed by all forms of circumcision.
 - iii. It is not surprising that for Israel the term "foreskin" bore a negative connotation, representing all that was against God and his people.
 - (1) Foreskin represented hostility and distancing from God, and as such, it was easy for the prophets to use "circumcision" language metaphorically, stressing Israel's need to have circumcised "lips" (Exod. 6:12, 30), "ears" (Jer. 6:10), "hearts" (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25–26; Ezek. 44:7, 9), and "fruit" (Lev. 19:23–25).
 - (2) To remain "uncircumcised" (both physically and spiritually) like the Philistines (Judg. 14:3; 15:18; 1 Sam. 14:6; 17:26, 36; 31:4//1 Chr. 10:4; 2 Sam. 1:20) or like the other foreign enemies of Israel (Isa. 52:1) was to separate yourself from God and to resign yourself to destruction. As stated explicitly by Ezekiel, Yahweh will destroy the "uncircumcised" and cast them to the realm of

- the dead (Ezek. 28:10; 31:18; 32:19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32).
- (3) Such truths highlight the remarkable significance of Jeremiah's including Judah among those with a foreskin in 9:25–26: "Behold, the days are coming—the declaration of Yahweh—when I will punish all who are circumcised with a foreskin—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all those [whose hair is] clipped at the temples, who are dwelling in the desert. For all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart."
- iv. Following the coming of Jesus, all national markers like physical circumcision became of no value. God's people were now distinguished solely by faith working itself out in love, which stood as the true sign of their identification with the Messiah through the transforming work of the Spirit (Rom. 2:28–29; Gal. 5:6; 6:14–16; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:33; 32:39; Ezek. 36:26–27).
3. The Abrahamic Covenant Community: Its Nature and Purpose in Genesis 17
- a. Its Nature:
- i. Not all biological descendants of Abraham were part of the line of covenant promise, for God restricted this benefit to Isaac's line in contrast to Ishmael's (17:19–20; cf. Rom. 9:7–8); this does not counter the fact that Ishmael became a great nation simply because he was Abraham's offspring (21:12–13).
 - ii. Not all covenant members were biologically connected to Abraham (17:12), which stresses that neither circumcision nor the covenant associated with it were race restrictive. God's promises were for all who would devote themselves to him.
- b. Its Purpose
- i. Part of the goal of Genesis 17 is to clarify how Abraham's call to "be a blessing" would result in global curse being reversed and "all the families of the earth" being blessed (12:2–3).
 - ii. The promises regarding royal parenthood:
 - Gen. 17:4–6. Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram ["exalted father"], but your name shall be Abraham ["father of a multitude"], for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.
 - Gen. 17:15–16. As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah ["princess"] shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of people shall come from her.
 - Gen. 35:11. I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body.
 - iii. The significance of the promises:
 - (1) The patriarchs' paternal relationship to the nations is most likely *not* restricted to biological descent.

- (a) Because the promise to Sarah that “she shall become nations” in 17:16 is most likely a reiteration of the parental promise made to Abraham (meaning the two promises refer to the same reality) and because two nations (Israel through Sarah’s grandson Jacob and Edom through her grandson Esau) seem far from the “multitude” that is promised, it seems likely that the parenthood referred to in Gen 17:4–6, 16 points beyond physical offspring.
 - (b) While the Ishmaelites, Edomites, Midianites, and several other peoples mentioned in the genealogy lists of Genesis 25 and 36 are known to have biologically descended from Abraham, only the one nation of Israel is known to have descended from Jacob. Consequently, the fact that Jacob is to bring forth a “company of nations” suggests his “family” is larger than Israel and will include other nations somehow related by adoption.
- (2) The patriarchs’ paternal relationship to the nations most likely points to royal authority wherein Abraham and his wife Sarah, the “princes” (Gen. 17:15), are regarded as the founders of a new dynasty that will climax in a specific, royal descendant who will rule Israelites (both native-born and alien residents) and vassal nations.
- (a) The use of “father” language in this more metaphorical sense parallels the use of the term throughout the ancient world for various social roles that bore an authoritative or shepherding function, the most significant of which is the designation of kings as “fathers” of their vassal peoples (cf. 1 Sam 24:11 vs. 24:16).
 - (b) While Abraham himself was never called a king, a number of textual hints, both in and outside Genesis, suggest that the author of Genesis wanted us to view him like one.
 - (i) He was to be the progenitor of a royal line: “kings will come from you” (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11).
 - (ii) He was promised to become a great nation, bear a great name, and receive divine protection (Gen. 12:2; cf. 18:18; 35:11; 46:3), all of which are qualities that point to a royal future *for Abraham* and his descendants (cf. 2 Sam 7:9; Ps 72:17).
 - (iii) His battle with the northern kings (Gen. 14:1–24), his covenant with Abimelech (21:22–34), and his standing in the eyes of the Canaanites (23:6) all portrayed the patriarch with status similar to his contemporary monarchs.
 - (iv) The LXX translator called Abraham a “king (βασιλεύς)” in place of his title as “prince (נָשִׂיךְ)” in 23:6.

- (v) Matthew opened his Gospel with a royal genealogy for the “King of the Jews”: “the genealogy of Jesus Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1; cf. 2:2).
- (3) While the royal adoption of the nations addressed in Genesis 17 will *result from* the “covenant of circumcision” (“through Israel the world will be blessed”), the adoption itself does not appear to be into this specific covenant. This is so because all circumcised members of the community (whether the alien resident or the father, son, or household servant among the native born) were considered part of *one nation* later named Israel (17:12; Josh. 8:33)—a nation that is here only one part of “the multitude of nations” parented by Abraham.
- (4) If indeed Abraham’s fatherhood of the nations is directly related to the promise of universal blessing and if that promise finds focus through a particular, individual descendant of Abraham (see the discussion above on the “first gospel” of Gen. 3:15), then *the stage is set for Paul, in a context of eschatological fulfillment in Christ, to identify Jew and Gentile as having a place in the family of Abraham apart from circumcision and the Law that would later be associated with it* (see Rom. 4:16–18; Gal. 3:29).

E. The Test of Covenant Loyalty (Gen. 22)

1. The Setting:

- a. Genesis 22 is generated by the messianic and missiological thrust of the book as a whole.
- b. For over 25 years, Abraham had been hoping in God’s promises regarding nationhood in general and the specific male offspring in particular. Through life changing encounters, remarkable victories, graphic visions, and miraculous provisions God had proved himself to Abraham.
- c. Most specifically, with no uncertainty, God had declared “what will come out of your loins shall be your heir” (15:4) and “I will establish my covenant with [Isaac] as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him” (17:19) and “through Isaac shall your offspring be named” (21:12). The hopes of the world rest on what God will do through Isaac and his offspring.
- d. None today who may claim, “God told me to kill my child,” have the extended history of miraculous provision and protection associated with Abraham and his family. Indeed, the dating of Abraham’s life appears to be intentionally designed to highlight the long miraculous bank account Yahweh had built up with Abraham before he commanded the patriarch to do what seems so contrary to his character and so explicitly against his promise.

Fig. 3.12. Dated Events in Abraham's Life

Event	Abe's Age
Abra(ha)m is called and goes from Haran to Canaan (12:4)	75
Abra(ha)m marries Hagar, Sarah's maidservant (16:3)	85
God renames Abram "Abraham" and establishes the covenant of circumcision (17:1, 24)	99
Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac is born (21:25; cf. 17:17, 21; 18:14)	100
Abraham dies (25:7-8)	175

2. The Test:
 - a. In light of this context, the reader must feel the weight of God's call for Abraham to "take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen 22:2).
 - b. The question to be answered in this test: "Does Abraham truly fear God in a way that creates sustained faith overflowing in obedience even when God's commission seems outrageous and in conflict with all his previous promises?" The answer: "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, *for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.*" (22:12).
 - c. In contrast to crazies today who may say, "God told me to kill my son, just like he did to Abraham," the test God gave Abraham appears to be non-reproducible, for it specifically related to the hope of a Messiah who has now come and it specifically follows a long-life of provision, protection, and promise-fulfillment witnessed to by many.
3. God's Faithfulness and Abraham's Obedience of Faith
 - a. Abraham was confident that God would either provide a substitute or would resurrect his son.
 - Gen. 22:5, 7-8. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."... ⁷And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "May father ... behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."
 - Heb. 11:17-19. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' ¹⁹He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."
 - b. As covenant head, Abraham's obedience proved that he was indeed righteous by faith, thus securing blessing for future generations and modeling the type of obedience God desires of all.
 - Gen. 22:16-18. By myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, *because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.*
 - Gen. 26:3-5. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven

and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. (Cf. Deut. 11:1; 26:17.)

- James 2:21–24. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.
- c. In response to Abraham’s fear-faith-obedience composite, Yahweh added an oath to his early promises of offspring and divine blessing, thus establishing the fulfillment of what was promised.
- Gen. 22:16. By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord. . . .
 - Luke 1:68–75. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷²to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us, ⁷⁴that we, being delivered from our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
 - Heb. 6:13–18. For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” ¹⁵And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. ¹⁶For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. ¹⁷So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.
- d. Abraham’s obedience of faith resulted in the display of God’s greatness throughout the generations. At the very place where the temple would one day be built, Yahweh provided a substitute sacrifice, thus showing himself merciful—the One who sees (i.e., provides for) those who trust in him.
- Gen. 22:2, 8, 13–14. [God] said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” . . . ⁸Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” . . . ¹³And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called the name of that place, “Yahweh will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.”
 - 2 Chr. 3:1. Then Solomon began to build the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where Yahweh had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.
4. Genesis 22 in Its Redemptive-Historical Context
- a. Because burnt offerings (22:2, 8) were the only offerings for sin prior to the establishment of the tabernacle, it appears that Isaac was to die a sinner’s death, as promised to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:17) and as brought upon the flood generation (6:5–6, 11–13) and Sodom and Gomorrah (19:24–25). Unlike the previous divine judgments, however, this one would be carried out by a human agent, much like Israel performing Yahweh’s war of judgment on the Canaanites.

- b. Because all messianic hope rested on Isaac, his sacrifice served as a pointer to the way the great salvation of humanity would only come through the death and resurrection of the promised One. However, the substitutionary sacrifice witnessed in Isaac's situation also points to the way sinners deserve a wrath that God pours out on another. In short, both Isaac and the ram appear to be pointers to Christ.
- c. God had declared to Abra(ha)m, "him who dishonors you I will curse" (12:3), and when he passed through the animal pieces he had also taken a self-maledictory oath upon himself, declaring that he would stop being God if he failed to fulfill his promise of land to Abra(ha)m's offspring. It appears, therefore, that if God was forced, due to Israel's disobedience, to curse Israel (Lev. 26; Deut. 27–28), then he would also ultimately be required to curse himself. The imagery of Genesis 22 may point in this direction.
- d. The surety of God's promise bound up in the oath of Gen 22:16 appears to stand behind the amazing divine faithfulness and radical human faith seen in the rest of the book:
 - i. God's oath here gives clarity to why the schemes of the youthful Jacob, the envy of Joseph's brothers (ch. 37), the sin of Judah (ch. 38), or a great famine could not thwart God's purposes for Israel.
 - ii. God's oath here gives clarity to the faith that stands behind Isaac's blessing both Jacob and Esau (27:27–29) and Jacob's blessing his twelve sons (ch. 48) (cf. Heb. 11:20–21).
 - iii. God's oath here gives clarity to Joseph's confidence in the exodus and his commission to have his bones buried in Canaan (50:24–25; cf. Exod. 13:19; Josh. 24:32; Heb. 11:22).

F. Summary of the Abrahamic Covenant:

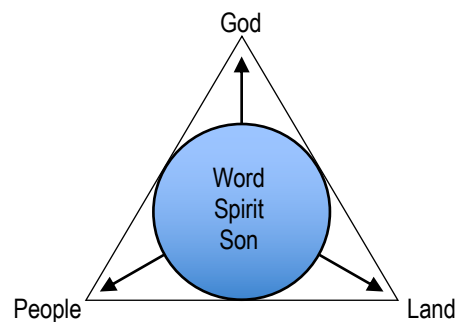
1. God's covenant relationship with Abraham and his offspring was unconditional, if by that we mean it was initiated by grace alone and would be perpetuated by grace alone.
 - a. *The land promise:* In the graphic act of Genesis 15, God declared that his promise to give Abra(ha)m's offspring the land would never be revoked; his commitment Abra(ha)m, the man of faith, would stand, apart from any deeds done.
 - b. *The offspring and divine blessing promises:* In Genesis 22, God swore to fulfill his promises to multiply Abraham's offspring and to bring a single male descendant that would overcome evil and serve as a conduit of blessing to the nations—all this because Abraham obeyed.
2. In spite of the perpetual promises, individual enjoyment of the covenant blessing was contingent on individual covenant loyalty. Obedience was mandatory but not meritorious. This obedience, however, was fruit growing from the root of faith—faith in God's promise to do for his people what they could not do on their own, including and most importantly his raising up a royal offspring who would defeat all that is hostile to God and his ways and restore blessing to the world.
3. According to Gen 12:1–3, blessing coming to the nations was contingent on Abraham and his offspring "being a blessing." Ultimately, Jesus is the one

through whom the blessing of Abraham reaches the nations. Galatians 3:8, 14: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ . . . In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [comes] to the Gentiles.”

4. God is both the initiator and sustainer of the relationship by enabling covenant loyalty (dependence, surrender, following) through motivating promises that all point to the realization of his sovereignty in all things for the joy of all peoples in Messiah Jesus.

VIII. The Agency of Blessing, Part 2—The Line of Promise in Egypt (Gen. 37:2–50:26)

IX. Summary of the Theology of Genesis in Light of the Covenant Triangle:



A. God

1. Yahweh, Lord of Creation (Gen. 1–4)
 - a. Creator-king over all
 - b. Covenant maker
 - c. The standard for and judge of good and evil
2. Yahweh, the Covenant Lord (Gen. 5:1–11:9)
 - a. The world’s judge
 - b. The covenant renewer
3. Yahweh, God Almighty (Gen. 11:10–50:26)
 - a. The One who calls, for a unique purpose
 - b. The One who makes believable and desirable promises
 - c. The oath taker
 - d. The able One
 - e. The judge of wickedness
 - f. The one who sees/provides
 - g. The purposeful sustainer

B. People

1. Humanity, Stewards of Creation (Gen. 1–4)
 - a. Imagers of God
 - b. Stewards of creation
 - c. The ideal and warped family defined
2. Humanity, Remnant and Rebel (Gen. 5:1–11:9)
3. Israel, a Channel of Blessing to the Nations (Gen. 11:10–50:26)

- a. Abra(ha)m’s initial obedience of faith
- b. The suzerain’s commitment and the vassal’s obligations
- c. The nature of Abraham’s faith and righteousness
- d. The nations, recipients of blessing

C. Land

1. The heaven and the earth as the context for divine-human relationship (Gen. 1–4)
 - a. Eden as a temple-palace
 - b. Mankind and animals come from and will return to the ground
 - c. Creation care and supply
 - d. Paradise lost and the cursed cosmos
2. Global destruction and renewal (Gen. 5:1–11:9)
 - a. The cursed cosmos
 - b. De-creation and recreation
 - c. Creation care and supply
3. The Promised Land (Gen. 11:10–50:26)
 - a. The royal grant
 - b. Now but not yet
 - c. The future hope
 - d. The contingency of holiness for keeping the land
 - e. Theological geography: the significance of the “Land Between”

D. Son-Spirit-Word

1. Divine presence and rule (Gen. 1–4)
 - a. God’s Spirit is active in creation.
 - b. God creates by his Word.
 - c. The man is the royal “son” who will oversee the kingdom building.
 - d. The “first gospel” anticipates a conquering, male, descendant of the woman who will destroy evil and restore blessing.
2. Divine presence and rule (Gen. 5:1–11:9)
 - a. God’s Spirit is active in recreation.
 - b. Noah is representative covenant head.
 - c. Instructions, blessings, and promises color the relationship.
3. Divine presence and rule (Gen. 11:10–50:26)
 - a. God’s presence establishes the covenant.
 - b. Words of instruction, promise, and oath color the relationship.
 - c. Anticipation is heightened for the male, royal offspring of promise.

X. Guided Reading for Genesis:

A. Points of Focus:

1. Key chapters: Gen. 1, 2, 3, 9, 12, 15, 17, 22, 49
2. Key persons: Abra(ha)m; Adam; Adam’s 3 sons: Able, Cain, Seth; Eliezer of Damascus; Esau; Eve; Hagar; Isaac; Jacob; Jacob’s 12 sons: Asher, Benjamin, Dan, Gad, Issachar, Joseph, Judah, Levi, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, Zebulun; Ishmael; Joseph’s two sons: Ephraim, Manasseh Laban; Leah; Lot; Melchizedek; Noah; Noah’s 3 sons: Ham, Japheth, Shem; Pharaoh; Potiphar; Rachel; Rebekah; Sarai/Sarah; Tamar; Terah

3. Key places: Babel, Canaan, Egypt, Garden of Eden, Goshen, Haran, Hebron, Ur, Sodom & Gomorrah

B. Questions:

- Historically, Jews and Christians alike have held that _____ was substantially the author / compiler of the first five books of the OT, which are also known as the _____. The most likely period for the author to have written / compiled the bulk of the first five books of the OT was during _____.
- The word that acts as a literary marker for Genesis, dividing the book into 10 (or 11) sections, is _____.
- Identify and place in chronological order the following names: Adam, Terah, Noah, Isaac, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin, Rebekah, Seth, Sarah, Ishmael, Rachel, Shem
- What are the two major types of covenants in the Old Testament and how are they described?
- List ten things you learn about God, humanity, and God's world in Genesis 1:1–2:3.
- In view of Genesis 1:26–28 and ch. 2, in what ways are the roles and responsibilities of men/women, husbands/wives similar and distinct? List some ways how the serpent's scheme and God's curses against Adam and Eve in ch. 3 directly correspond to the roles/responsibilities given to the man and woman in ch. 2.
- Characterize the covenant God established in Genesis 9. Who were the parties of the covenant, and what were the promises, obligations, and the sign of the covenant?
- Reorganize the biblical references on the right to align with the correct people or items on the left:

Adam	Sees his father's nakedness & is cursed
Eve	Renamed Israel
Adam & Eve	Cursed because of Adam's sin
Serpent	Seek to make a name for themselves by building a tower
Creation/ground	Requested his body be taken to Canaan after Israel leaves Egypt
Tower of Babel	Compared stars to Abraham's future offspring
Noah	First given responsibility to cultivate & keep the Garden of Eden
Ham	Where God confuses language
Shem	Builds an ark
People of Babel	Where Isaac was almost sacrificed
Abraham	God will dwell in his tents
God	First deceived by the serpent
Mt. Moriah	God clothes with animal skins
Jacob	Will one day be overcome by the woman's offspring/seed
Joseph	The one through whom the world will be blessed

- What was the object of Abra(ha)m's faith in Genesis 15:6? What was so awesome about the promise God made Abra(ha)m (cf. 11:29–30; 18:19–15)?

10. What is the significance of the “cutting” ritual described in Genesis 15:7–21? (See Jeremiah 34:18–19 along with the note at Genesis 15:17.)
11. Examining the details of Genesis 12, 15, and 17, characterize the covenant God established with Abraham and his offspring. What were the promises, obligations, and the sign of the covenant?
12. According to Genesis 22:1, 12, why did God call Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac? How does the promise given to Abraham in 22:17b–18 relate to the curse against the serpent in 3:15 (cf. Galatians 3:16; Acts 3:25–26; Rom 16:20)?
13. “_____, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down to you.... The scepter shall not depart from _____, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” To whom did Jacob declare this blessing? Any idea what is significant about this blessing for the future of God’s people ... and the world?
14. “Now behold, I myself do establish my covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth, with you.” To whom did God declare these words?
15. “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; 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; 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.” To whom did God declare these words?
16. “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.” To whom did god declare these words?