

**PREFACE**

So far we have traced Messiah's lineage from the first woman, through Noah's son, Shem. The next ancestor of note is considered the father of the Hebrews: Abraham. In point of fact, Abraham was "father" of far more than just Israel.

In the covenant God made with Abraham we have one more "gospel" situated not in the NT, but the Old. No less than the apostle Paul declared it such in his letter to the Galatians.

**Read Galatians 3:8-9.** [We will be returning several times to Galatians 3]

William Varner puts it this way:

The Lord's covenant with Abraham was the fountain from which flowed all of His redemptive purposes for Israel and for mankind as a whole. *In a real sense, the remainder of the Biblical account from Genesis 12 through the Revelation is an outworking of the covenant promises to this patriarch.* (emphasis added)

One cannot divorce the gospel from the Messiah, for it was through the Christ that the "good news" of salvation by faith would be instituted for all the world. In Christ, through the shedding of His blood, man would be saved by an act of God's grace—not by his own behavior. And this was prefigured in Abraham. Throughout the narrative of Abraham in Genesis, and beyond, into his immediate descendants, both the Messiah and the gospel are alternately prefigured. But it is important that we remember: Abraham was not just a *picture* of what would come many centuries later; Abraham *was* justified, saved by faith.

**BLESSINGS: GENESIS 12:1-3**

**Read Genesis 12:1-3.**

The Messiah does not make an explicit appearance in these verses, but His gospel does. First, God's promise to Abraham is unilateral—it is not dependent on Abraham's behavior. God told him, "I *will* bless you." Second, and more important, the families and nations of the earth would be blessed through or in him. **Here is the gospel; here is grace**, which becomes more evident when we examine the word translated by all our versions, "earth."

**earth** = *adama* = from <H119> ('**adam**'); **soil** (from its general redness) :- country, earth, **ground**, husband [-man] (-ry), land.

The older commentators liked to translate this as "ground" to emphasize its connection to Genesis 3.

**Read Genesis 3:17.**

In Genesis 5, at the birth of Noah, we are reminded of God's curse of the ground.

Now he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed."  
Genesis 5:29

But now, in Abraham, the Lord is extending grace to the people of the ground, and the curse will reside only in those who curse, or reject this grace.

*K&D*: The blessing of Abraham was once more to unite the divided families, and change the curse, pronounced upon the ground on account of sin, into a blessing for the whole human race.

And notice how the channel through which this grace, this salvation is narrowing: through the first woman, through Shem, and now through Abraham. At the same time, however, that which in Shem narrowed—from all humanity, down to one family line or race (the Semites)—in Abraham will be broadened. In Genesis 9:27 we learned that God would bless the line of Shem by dwelling in His tents; here God's blessings are extended to "all the families of the earth." **There is the gospel; there is the Messiah**—and the apostle Paul tells us so back in Galatians 3.

### **Read Galatians 3:13-14.**

**Sidebar:** Perhaps now is a good time, before we move on to v7, to clarify something. Just as the OT is filled with Messianic prophecies, the OT is peppered with *types* of Christ. For example, the splendid Melchizedek serves as a type of the Messiah who would be both priest and king. Abraham is *not* a type of Christ; he is a type of those who would later believe as he. Abraham is our supreme example of *faith*. As it is put by Moisés Silva,

Paul brings up the figure of Abraham to point out not only that we should believe as the patriarch did, but also, and more fundamentally, that when we believe, we become recipients of the redemptive blessings that God promised to him.

### **SEED: GENESIS 12:7.**

In v1 the Lord told Abraham to "go forth...to the land which I will show you." In v5 Abraham and his family arrive in that land: Canaan. Then the Lord adds to His promise of blessings, the land of Canaan.

### **Read Genesis 12:7.**

As the KJV makes clear, the word translated "descendants" or "offspring" in v7 is our old friend, *zarah*, first encountered in Chapter Three. Just as in English, the word *zarah*, "seed", has both a collective and an individual meaning: it can refer to generations that proceed, or a specific individual that proceeds. Likewise, as in all the passages we have examined so far, the text can have a literal, earthly meaning, along with being a Messianic prophecy.

It is obvious that here the Lord is promising Abraham that this land of the Canaanites will be given to his descendants—the people flowing from the literal, physical seed of the patriarch. But there is also a Messianic reference in this text, and we need only turn to Scripture itself to understand it.

### **Read Galatians 3:16.**

What Paul is pointing out (among other things) is that there *is* a plural form of the Hebrew *zarah*, but that is not what was used in Genesis 12:7. It is, instead, the *collective singular*—meaning it can go either way or both ways. It can refer to Abraham's generations of physical seed—numbered, as the Lord put it in Chapter Fifteen, as the uncountable stars—or it can refer to just one individual. In this prophecy, **the Christ, the Messiah**.

## GENESIS 15

In Chapter Fifteen of Genesis we have another unilateral covenant established by Yahweh. Once again, it is not a specific Messianic prophecy, but a prefiguring of the gospel that would be established *through* the Messiah. It is a fascinating, even bizarre, event orchestrated by the Lord God to establish His promise to Abraham and his seed in a most dramatic way. Varner writes,

This chapter is important because it is vital to understanding the absolute certainty and reliability of God's promises to His people.

The chapter opens with a promise, followed by an intimate dialogue between the frustrated patriarch and his God.

### Read Genesis 15:1-5.

What was Abraham's response?

### Read Genesis 15:6.

**There is the gospel; there is the Messiah.** Keep in mind the time frame: Though a Shemite, Abraham is not a Jew, nor is he circumcised. He is a Chaldean Semite. There is no law, there are no Ten Commandments to obey. There is just belief.

**believed** = *aman* = a primitive root; properly **to build up or support**; to foster as a parent or nurse; figurative **to render (or be) firm or faithful, to trust** or believe, **to be permanent** or quiet; moral **to be true or certain**; once (Isa. 30:21; by interchange for <H541> ('aman)) to go to the right hand :- hence assurance, believe, bring up, establish, + fail, be faithful (of long continuance, **steadfast**, sure, surely, trusty, verified), nurse, (-ing father), (put), trust, turn to the right.

And what is Yahweh's response to this belief? "He reckoned it to him as righteousness." **Here is the gospel of Christ born: righteousness by faith alone.**

When Yahweh continues with His promise to give Canaan to Abraham and his seed, Abraham responds—not to buttress doubt, but to seek surety—with "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?" (v8) And the Lord's answer brings us to the moment, especially to our modern, western sensibilities, that is downright bizarre. Yet Varner writes that it is

one of the most fascinating and instructive incidents in the entire Bible. When the details of this ritual are sorted out, we stand amazed at the wondrous promise-keeping God we serve.

God's response to Abraham is recorded in vv9-21. We find the specific promise in vv18-21, where the Lord reiterates and expands with greater detail His promise of a land for Abraham's seed. But our focus is on the ritual that leads up to that promise. The Lord first tells Abraham to collect three animals and arrange them in a specific manner.

### Read Genesis 15:8-11.

Prefiguring the Levitical sacrifices of clean animals that would be commanded in the Mosaic law, Yahweh has Abraham cut the three mammals in two and lay them out on the ground—each half facing the other.

Not surprisingly, birds of prey are immediately attracted to the fresh blood and meat, but Abraham successfully drives them away. This, too, is part of the prophecy, which the Lord explains to Abraham as he sleeps, in vv12-14.

### Read Genesis 15:12-14.

This is part of the Lord's promise: Abraham's seed would be "afflicted" ("oppressed," "mistreated") for four hundred years; this is fulfilled, of course, in the oppression of Israel in Egypt—which will take place roughly 500 years after this moment. In fact, it is described using the same Hebrew word, in Exodus 1.

So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. (Exodus 1:11-12; emphasis added)

But the most important passage for our study is vv17-18.

### Read Genesis 15:17-18.

Here is the *shekinah*—the consuming holiness of God's glory. And note: "it [the shekinah glory of God] passed between these pieces." What did this signify? That the Lord, literally, "cut a covenant."

**made** = *karat* = a primitive root; **to cut** (off, down or asunder); by implication to destroy or consume; **specifically to covenant (i.e. make an alliance or bargain, origin by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces)** : - be chewed, be con- [feder-] ate, covenant, cut (down, off), destroy, fail, feller, be freed, hew (down), make a league ([covenant]), × lose, perish, × utterly, × want.

Instituted here, this became the manner by which two parties came to agreement and established a covenant or alliance with each other. The ceremony meant that if any party reneged on the agreement he would suffer the same cutting as the animals. *If I don't hold up my end, let me suffer the same fate as these.* Listen to how familiar this sounds from Jeremiah 34.

[Thus says the Lord,] "I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts—the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth." (Jeremiah 34:18-20)

So what are we to take away from this?

- By employing this mystical ceremony to establish His promise to Abraham, Yahweh was effectively saying, *If I don't hold up my end, let me suffer the same fate as these.* Could the Sovereign Lord of the universe actually be cut in half—severed and mutilated? Of course not; that would be impossible. So by using this ceremony God was saying that it would be impossible for Him *not* to keep His promise.
- This was a **unilateral covenant** made by Yahweh. In the more customary use of this type of covenant, both parties would pass between the divided flesh. But here (v17), only Yahweh "passed between the pieces." Effectively He was declaring, *I will keep my promise to you, no matter what you or your seed do.* Nothing that Israel does will invalidate these promises. The people *will* endure, the Messiah *will* come, the land *will* be theirs.

**That is grace; that is the gospel; that is the Messiah.**

I want to close by reading what the writer to the Hebrews says about this.

**Read Hebrews 6:13-20.**

**Genesis 12:1-7**

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you;

2 **And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;**

3 **And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."**

4 So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

5 Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.

6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.

7 **The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.**

***The Abrahamic Prediction (1)*****Eight Promises to Abram**

1. God would make him into great nation
2. He would bless Him
3. He would make his name great
4. Abram and his seed would be a blessing to others
5. God would bless those who blessed him
6. He would curse those who cursed him
7. **Through Abram and his seed God would be the channel of blessings to all peoples on earth**
8. God would give to Abram's seed the land he had entered after leaving Ur

*descendants = seed (zerah)*

**Matthew 1:1**

The record of the genealogy of **Jesus the Messiah**, the son of David, **the son of Abraham**...

**Galatians 3:8, 16**

8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached **the gospel beforehand** to Abraham, saying, "**All the nations will be blessed in you.**"

16 **Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.**

**Galatians 3:29**

**And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants**, heirs according to promise.

**Romans 4:10-12**

10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, **so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,**

12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but **who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham** which he had while uncircumcised.

**Genesis 15:1-6**

1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."  
 2 Abram said, "O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"  
 3 And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."  
 4 Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir."  
 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."  
 6 **Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.**

**Genesis 15:8-14, 17-18**

8 He said, "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?"  
 9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon."  
 10 **Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds.**  
 11 The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.  
 12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.  
 13 God said to Abram, "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.  
 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.  
 15 **It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.**  
 16 **On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram,** saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river..."

***The Abrahamic Prediction (2)***

"This chapter is important because it is vital to understanding the absolute certainty and reliability of God's promises to His people." (Varner)

**Romans 4:2-5**

2 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 credited to him as righteousness."**  
 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.  
 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

**Jeremiah 34:18-20**

18 "I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts—  
 19 **the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—**  
 20 I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.

**Hebrews 6:13-18**

13 **For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,**  
 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you."  
 15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.  
 16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.  
 17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,  
 18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.