

The Covenant with

Abraham

A
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Teaching Series

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Lesson 5 Outline: *God's Covenant with Abraham*

I. The Background of the Abrahamic Covenant

1. The descendants of NOAH: *Genesis 10*

*Japheth (10:2-5)

→ Places recorded in Genesis 10:2-5

→ The prophecy of missionary labors in Isaiah 66:18-21

→ The sons of Japheth are outsiders who would take refuge in the God of Shem

*Ham (10:6-20)

→ From Cush would come *Babylon and Assyria* (vv10-11)

→ From Mizraim would come the *Egyptians and the Philistines* (vv13-14)

→ From Canaan would come the *Canaanites* (vv15-18)

*Shem (10:21-31)

→ From Shem would come Eber (v21), from where we get the term Hebrews

→ From Shem would come Abraham and the nation of Israel

→ From Shem would also come Christ the Messiah

2. The Tower of BABEL: *Genesis 11:1-9*

*The STORY of the Tower of Babel:

- Instead of filling the earth (1:28; 9:1), mankind stayed in one place (11:2,4)
- Instead of seeking God's glory, they sought to make a name for themselves (11:4)
- The heart of their sin is self-sufficiency: seeking security and significance apart from God

*The SIGNIFICANCE of the Tower of Babel:

- Points us backwards to Eden, and Adam's rebellion against God in Genesis 3
- Points us forwards to Babylon, the kingdom from Babel that would oppose God
- Points us inward to our own hearts: what ways am I doing the same thing?
- Points us upward to God and all that He has promised (cf. Gen.15:1)

LEARNING FROM THE TOWER OF BABEL

THE DESIRE	THE ISSUE	GOD'S PROMISE	THE LESSON
1) To build a city (v4a) 2) To not be scattered abroad (v4d)	Seeking <i>security</i> in other things apart from God	"Abram, I am a shield to you" (Gen.15:1).	God knows how to <i>protect</i> His people
1) To build a tower (v4b) 2) To make a name for themselves (v4c)	Seeking <i>significance</i> from others apart from God	"Your reward shall be very great" (Gen.15:1)	God knows how to <i>reward</i> His people

3. The Ancestry of ABRAHAM: *Genesis 11:10-32*

*A Few Observations:

- The people in the genealogy of Genesis 5 lived a lot longer than those in Genesis 11
- Unlike Genesis 5, it seems the believing line of Genesis 11 fell into idolatry (Josh.24:2)

*A Single Question:

- Why didn't Terah make it to Canaan?
- The meaning of his name may give us the answer

II. An Overview of the Abrahamic Covenant

1. The covenant with Abraham is *the next stage* in the Covenant of Grace:
 - I. The Covenant of Works with Adam
 - II. The Genesis 3:15 promise of a Redeemer:
 - A) The Noahic Covenant
 - B) *The Abrahamic Covenant*
 - C) The Mosaic Covenant
 - D) The Davidic Covenant
 - E) The New Covenant
2. The primary passages are Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; and 22:15-19
3. The covenant is established with Abraham and confirmed to him as well as Isaac and Jacob
4. The covenant with Abraham is absolutely central to understanding the story of redemption
5. As with Noah, the covenant with Abraham includes the temporal as well as the eternal

III. What we learn from the Abrahamic Covenant

1. The CALL of the Covenant of Grace: *We learn about how God draws us to himself*

*The NATURE of God's call:

A) There are COMMANDS in the gospel (12:1)

→ God commands Abram to leave:

*his country (*land*)

*his relatives (*people*)

*and his father's house (*authority/heritage*)

B) There are PROMISES in the gospel (12:2-3)

→ “I will make you a great nation. . .”

→ “And I will bless you. . .”

→ “And [I will] 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 shall be blessed.”

C) SUMMARY: There are both commands and promises in the gospel:

	LAND	PEOPLE	HERITAGE
WHAT ABRAM LEFT	His country (12:1)	His relatives (12:1)	His father's house (12:1)
WHAT GOD PROMISED	Possess a new land (12:1,7)	Father a new people (12:2)	Gain a new heritage (12:2-3)

→ We see this same pattern in the gospels:

*The gospel command: “Follow Me. . .” (both repentance and faith)

*The gospel promises: “he who believes in the Son has eternal life”

*The POWER of God's call:

→ Abram's fickle faith (Gen.11:31; 12:5; Acts 7:3)

→ God's sovereign power (Gen.15:7; Acts 7:4)

→ We don't believe because we chose God—we believe because God chose us

2. The RECIPIENTS of the Covenant of Grace: *We learn about who God's people are*

*God's people are NEW CREATURES (Gen.12:4-9)

→ Abram has a new relationship *with God*

→ Abram has a new relationship with *the world*

*God's people are **STRUGGLING SINNERS** (Gen.12:10-20)

→ Abram fails both God and his wife

→ An important lesson here: there are no Christian heroes

→ One way we see Christ in the OT is in how God's people fail to exemplify Him

3. The **PROMISES** of the Covenant of Grace: *We learn about what we've been given in Christ*

*We can condense God's promises to Abram down to three main promises:

GOD'S PROMISES	GIVEN TO ABRAHAM	CONFIRMED TO ISAAC AND JACOB
Promise of the LAND	Genesis 12:7; 13:15,17; 15:7; 17:8	Genesis 26:3-4; 28:13-14; 35:12
Promise of a SEED	Genesis 12:7; 13:16; 15:5,18; 16:10; 17:7-10; 22:17	Genesis 26:4,24; 28:13-14; 35:11-12
Promise of BLESSING	Genesis 12:2,3; (17:6);18:17-18; 22:17-18	Genesis 26:3-4,24; 28:14

*These promises of land, seed, and blessing contained *temporal aspects*

*But behind the temporal aspects of land, seed, and blessing were *eternal realities*

A) The promise of **LAND** pointed to an eternal reality:

*The true **BOUNDARIES** of the land (Rom.4:13; Matt.5:5)

*The true **DURATION** of the land (Gen.17:8; Ps.37:29)

*The true **ENJOYMENT** of the land (Heb.11:9-10, 13-16; Ps.37:9,11,22,29,34)

B) The promise of **SEED** pointed to an eternal reality:

1) The **CHILD** of promise: *A single seed, the coming Savior*

→ Galatians 3:16 (cf. Gen.3:15; 12:3; 22:18)

2) The **CHILDREN** of promise: *A great multitude, believers in Jesus*

→ Galatians 3:6-9, 29 (cf. Rom.9:6-8; Gen.13:16; 15:5; 22:17)

→ Question: What does all this mean for ethnic Israel??

C) The promise of **BLESSING** pointed to an eternal reality:

1) Scripture equates the blessing of Abraham with **SALVATION**

→ Galatians 3:8-9; Acts 3:25-26; Romans 4:1-9

HOW PAUL UNPACKS THE PROMISE OF GENESIS 12:3 IN GALATIANS

GENESIS 12:3	HOW THE BLESSING WOULD COME	WHO WOULD BE BLESSED	WHAT THE BLESSING IS
THE PROMISE	“And in you...	...all the families of the earth...	...will be blessed.”
THE MEANING	In Christ (Galatians 3:16)	People from all Nations (3:7,29)	Will be Justified (3:8-9)

2) Scripture equates the blessing of Abraham with **THE SPIRIT**

→ Galatians 3:13-14; Isaiah 44:1-3

*So, the promises of land, seed, and blessing always pointed to eternal realities (Gen.17:7-8)

	TEMPORAL ASPECTS	ETERNAL REALITIES SIGNIFIED	PROOF FROM THE SCRIPTURES
LAND	Physical land	An eternal habitation	Gen.17:8; Ps.37; Rom.4:13; Heb.11:8-13
SEED	Physical offspring	Christ & believers in Christ	Gal.3:16 & Rom.9:6-8; Gal.3:6-9,29; 4:28
BLESSING	Physical blessing	Salvation applied by the Spirit	Acts 2:38-39; 3:25-26; Gal.3:813-14

*In closing, we can note that each and every promise God made took time to reach fulfillment:

→ The promise of **LAND** at first seemed not to be true. . .

→ The promise of a **SEED** at first seemed not to be true. . .

→ The promise of BLESSING at first seemed not to be true. . .

4. The NATURE of the Covenant of Grace: *We learn about how sinners can find favor with God*

*God lavishes His favor on sinners by GRACE alone (Gen.12; 16; 20)

→ Evident in God's promises

→ Evident through Abram's blunders

*God lavishes His favor on sinners through FAITH alone (Gen.15:6)

→ Faith is alone (Rom. 4:3-5)

→ Faith is instrumental (Rom. 4:13)

→ Faith can be weak (Gen. 15-16, etc)

*God lavishes His favor on sinners in CHRIST alone:

A) Jesus is the SEED that God promised (Gen.12:3; 22:18)

B) Jesus is the SAVIOR that Abraham trusted (Jn.8:56)

C) Jesus is the SUBSTANCE that the narratives fore-pictured. . .

1) ISAAC set forth as a picture of Christ in His SUFFERINGS (Gen. 22)

2) ABRAHAM set forth as a picture of Christ in His OBEDIENCE (Gen. 22)

THE LORD'S WORDS TO ABRAHAM IN GENESIS 22:18

NOT	“Abraham, YOU will be blessed because <i>you</i> obeyed My voice”	A Personal Righteousness
NOR	“Abraham, <i>the nations</i> will be blessed because THEY will obey My voice”	
BUT	“Abraham, <i>the nations</i> will be blessed because <i>you</i> obeyed My voice”	A Covenantal Righteousness

	ITS OBJECTS	ITS BASIS	ITS MEANS	ITS SOURCE
MAN'S WAY	God blesses <i>good people</i>	By some <i>merit achieved</i>	Obtained through <i>good works</i>	Of <i>the Law</i>
GOD'S WAY	God blesses <i>real sinners</i>	Only by <i>grace received</i>	Freely given through <i>faith alone</i>	In <i>Christ</i>

5. The STABILITY of the Covenant of Grace: *We learn about the security we have in Christ*

*The context of the passage

→ God's words to Abram (Gen. 15:1)

→ Abram's words to God (Gen. 15:2-3)

*The meaning of the covenant ceremony of Genesis 15

→ What is this oath? *A self-maledictory oath. . .*

→ Who takes this oath? *God alone. . .*

→ How to understand this oath? *God putting His promises in writing. . .*

6. The MARK of the Covenant of Grace: *We learn about how we can know our faith is real*

*What we've learned so far:

→ God gives His people commands to obey in the Covenant of Grace

→ But our relationship with God is never contingent on us keeping those commands

*If this is true, how are we to understand James 2:14-26?

→ James is talking about the *marks* (not the means) of true saving faith

→ James language: he uses “works” where Paul uses “fruit”

→ James' message:

*True faith is a faith that shows itself through works (vv14,18,22)

*Our works don't justify us—but they justify the reality of our faith (cf. Lk.7:35)

*An intellectual faith with no life-change is not true saving faith

COMPARING THE DIFFERENT EMPHASIS OF PAUL AND JAMES

PAUL'S FOCUS	How we're justified	Justification is by faith apart from works	Faith justifies us
JAMES' FOCUS	What kind of faith justifies	Justifying faith will always produce works	Works justify our faith

7. The SIGN of the Covenant of Grace: *We learn about the badge God has given His people*

A) The Context of the Passage:

→ Abram's sin couldn't nullify God's promises to him

→ God reminds Abram of two things: 1) His character and 2) His covenant

B) The Nature, Importance, and Purpose of Covenant Signs:

→ Covenant signs are tangible pictures of God's everlasting promises

→ Covenant signs are the foundation for our understanding of the sacraments

→ Covenant signs are given for the purpose of assuring God's people of His promises

C) The Meaning of Circumcision:

→ It WASN'T an ETHNIC sign (Gen.17:12-13)

→ It WASN'T a NATIONAL sign (Gen.17:7)

→ It was rather a SPIRITUAL sign:

1) Because *the covenant was a spiritual covenant*. . .

→ The covenant with Abram is about salvation in the fullest sense (v7)

→ And circumcision was given as *the sign of that covenant* (17:11)

2) Because *Scripture explicitly tells us so* . . .

*Circumcision signified **JUSTIFICATION** by **FAITH**

→ Romans 4:11: Circumcision was the mark of saving faith

*Circumcision signified **REGENERATION** by the **SPIRIT**

→ Jeremiah 4:4: Circumcision was the mark of the new birth

→ Circumcision was then the OT mark of **SPIRITUAL** identity

→ Baptism is now the NT mark of **SPIRITUAL** identity (Col.2:11-12)

HOW NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM SIGNIFIES THE SAME THINGS AS OLD TESTAMENT CIRCUMCISION

THE INWARD REALITY THAT HAPPENED TO YOU	THE OUTWARD SIGN THAT MARKED YOU	
	IN THE OLD TESTAMENT	IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
Justification by Faith	CIRCUMCISION	BAPTISM
Regeneration by the Spirit		
Becoming a member of God's People		

D) The Recipients of Circumcision:

1) Circumcision was to be applied to **ADULT CONVERTS**:

*We see this with Abram in particular (Rom.4:11)

*We see this same principle in general (Ex.12:42-49)

*NT Application: We baptize adults who come to faith in Christ

2) Circumcision was to be applied to **COVENANT CHILDREN**:

*We see this with Abram's household (Gen.17:9-14)

*The sign Abram only received after believing he is to give to his entire household

*It was adult circumcision for Abram—but it was infant circumcision for his children

E) The Implications for Household Baptism:

→ It is for this reason that we mark children of believers with the NT covenant sign:

WHAT IS THE COVENANT SIGN		WHO RECEIVES THE COVENANT SIGN	WHEN THE COVENANT SIGN IS GIVEN
OLD TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT		
CIRCUMCISION	BAPTISM	ADULT CONVERTS	Only after profession of faith in the Lord
		COVENANT CHILDREN	At infancy before faith in the Lord is possible

→ We apply the sign of the covenant to our children because they are part of the covenant

*The promises aren't just made to us. . .

*They also extend to our children.

	INITIAL ENTRANCE INTO THE COVENANT	WHICH IS EXPECTED TO BE FOLLOWED BY
ADULT CONVERTS	The Reality: Inward Covenant Faith	The Rite: Outward Covenant Sign
COVENANT CHILDREN	The Rite: Outward Covenant Sign	The Reality: Inward Covenant Faith

→ The New Testament reinforces (rather than reverses) this same truth:

*Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:39; Gen.17:7)

→ The promise “for you and your children”

*The household baptisms of the early church (Acts 16:14-15, 33-34; 18:8)

→ The baptism of entire households sounds a lot like Genesis 17

*Paul's words about covenant children (1Cor.7:14)

→ God sees children of believers as set apart from children of unbelievers

*Old Testament prophecies of the New Covenant (Deut.30:6; Is.59:21)

→ Even the OT promises of the New Covenant extend to covenant children

F) A Vital Clarification about Baptism:

→ There's a difference between being **IN** the covenant and **OF** the covenant

→ Being a covenant child never guarantees salvation

UNDER THE COVENANT REALM VERSUS POSSESSING THE COVENANT REALITY

	BELONG TO THE COVENANT OF GRACE		MARKED BY	MEMBERS OF
THOSE MERELY UNDER THE <i>REALM</i> OF THE COVENANT	As only under its Administration	Only Externally; Only Outwardly	Only the Covenant Sign	Only the Visible Church
THOSE TRULY POSSESSING THE <i>REALITY</i> OF THE COVENANT	As true partakers of its Essence	Externally <i>and</i> Internally; Outwardly <i>and</i> Inwardly	The Sign <i>and</i> the Reality	The Visible <i>and</i> the Invisible Church

→ There were OT covenant children who never embraced the God of the covenant:

*The example of Esau (Rom.9:13)

*The words of Paul (Rom.2:28-29)

*OT covenant children could be either covenant keepers or covenant breakers

→ There are NT covenant children who never embrace the God of the covenant:

*Jesus' parable in Matthew 13

*Jesus' words in John 15:2

*The sign of the covenant is a sign of judgment as well as a sign of salvation

*Being a part of the covenant community is wonderful—but also dangerous

G) A Brief Summary:

- 1) The covenant promises to Abraham were about salvation in the fullest sense
- 2) The covenant promises were made not only to Abraham *but also* to his offspring

- 3) The covenant sign of circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of that salvation:
 - a) Abraham was marked with circumcision to signify his faith only *after* he believed
 - b) Yet he was then to apply that same sign to his infant sons *before* belief was possible
- 4) NT believers have entered into the same covenant promises made to Abraham
- 5) The Scriptures teach that those covenant promises still extend to our children
- 6) Thus, our infant children should continue to be marked with the covenant sign
- 7) This doesn't mean that all Abraham's children (or ours) will be saved: this is by faith alone
- 8) But it does mean that our children are part of the covenant and should receive the sign

H) The Mystery in the Covenant:

→ If God's covenant includes children of believers, why are some of them never saved?

→ There are 2 main answers that have been given to this question:

- 1) Some view God's promises in Genesis 17:7 to be a **CONDITIONAL OFFER**

**The problem:* A promise is very different than an offer

- 2) Genesis 17:7 is truly an **UNCONDITIONAL PROMISE**

**God is promising to save the elect among our covenant children*

**God is promising to preserve an elect line in and through our covenant children*

I) Final Reflections:

→ God invites us to **PRAYER** for our children (Mk.10:13-16)

→ God also invites us to **NURTURE** our children (Gen.18:17-18)

→ We teach with expectation, asking Jesus to do for and in our children what we cannot