

Structural Timeline of the Abrahamic Narrative

Genealogy of Terah and Sons (11:27-32)

Leave Country and Relatives (12:1-9)

Sarai at Risk (12:10-20)

Abram and Lot Separate/Abram Rescues Lot (13:1-14:17)

Abram and Melchizedek (14:17-24)

Covenant: God Unilaterally Guarantees the Blessings (15:1-21)

Ishamel is Born; Hagar departs; God hears (16:1-16)

Covenant of Circumcision; Abram and Sarai receive new names (17:1-27)

Lot Rescued by God; Abram and Lot Separate (18:1-19:38)

Sarai at Risk (20:1-18)

Issac Born; Hagar and Ishamel Departs; God hears (21:1-21)

Abraham and Abimelech (21:22-34)

Test: Akedah of Issac (22:1-22)

Sarah's Death and Burial (23:1-20)

Return to Country and Relatives; Rebekkah Succeeds Sarah (24:1-67)

Genealogy of Abraham and Ishmael (25:1-18)

¹Go for yourself from your country,

And from your relatives,

And from your father's house,

To the land which I will show you;

(1) **²And I will make you a great nation,**

(2) And I will bless you,

(3) And make your name great

That you **be a blessing.**

(1) **³And I will bless the one blessing you,**

(2) And the one who holds you in contempt, I must curse.

(3) And in you, all the families of the earth will bless themselves.

Genesis 12:1-3 can be summarized as follows: Abram you go out, and when you do, I promise to do three things for you. And I will do those three things so that you will be a blessing. And when you are a blessing, I promise to do three more things for you. **God's choice of Abram and His Word to him had a purpose and Abram's obedience brought blessing to himself and others. There is no blessing apart from obedience.**

And note, that all six of these promises are conditioned on Abram's obedience!

Also notice that the word, "blessing" occurs 5 times (the noun, once, the verb 4 times), which has the idea of "enrichment," spiritual, physical or both.

These promises are not the Abrahamic covenant. They would be ratified by God and become part of the Abrahamic Covenant by God alone in Genesis 15.

The Promise Confirmed and Further Defined (Genesis 12:4-8)

The narrator records Abram's response to God's Word to Him: "So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him" (12:4). The Hebrew word translated "Go Forth" is the Hebrew word, **הַלֵּךְ** (hlk), and is used 4 times in Genesis 12:1-9 ["Go for yourself"(1); "went forth" (4); "set out" (5); "continuing" (9)].

This repetition reinforces the critical point of Abram's response to God – obedience. (Compare this to Noah's similar response to God: Gensis 6:22; 7:5. 16).

It is important to note the parenthetical mention of Abram's age in 12:4: "Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran." Abram's age will be mentioned several times in the narrative, and serves to reinforce that God is responsible for the fulfillment of the promises made to Abram, and man advanced in years who obviously increases as the narrative continues. Abram's age also serves as an important structural marker in the narrative.

Genesis 12:5 notes who went with Abram when he departed from Haran: Sarai, Lot, and "the persons they had acquired in Haran" which may be a reference, not to slaves, but to people that had come to believe in God's, as his brother and father had believed, due to Abram's proclamation concerning God.

Genesis 12:6 notes that Abram and his companions arrived in Canaan as far as Shechem. And they the narrator gives us another parenthetical statement: "Now the Canaanite was then in the land." Abram was truly a pilgrim in a strange and very pagan land.

Genesis 12:7 records God's response to Abram's obedience by departing Haran and going forth to the land of Canaan. The LORD appeared to Abram and said,

“To you descendants I will give this land.” In 12:1, we are told “the LORD said to Abram.” Here the LORD appeared to Abram. The LORD rewards Abram’s obedience by giving further definition to the promise. A nation would require a land and descendants. God promised these both to Abram.

And what was Abram’s response: public worship (an example of covenantal loyalty).

After worshiping the LORD near Shechem, Abram and his party journey to a point between Bethel and Ai. There Abram built another altar for worship. And then the text says that Abram “called on the name of the Lord.” We first saw this same expression in Genesis 4:26, where the Sethites began to publicly proclaim the LORD’s name – His attributes and works.

Thus, as this section ends, we begin to see the results of Abraham’s obedience. Abram arrives in the land, and God confirms the promise He made to Abram by giving further definition to the promised “nation” – by promising a land and descendants. And note Abram’s response to the LORD. When Abram arrives in the land of Canaan, he begins to publicly worship and call on the name of the LORD. The LORD promised to make Abram’s name great, but when Abram arrives in the land, he proceeds to make the LORD’s name great in the land of Canaan (What a contrast to the those who were building the Tower of Babel. Their goal was: “let us make for ourselves a name” [Genesis 11:4]).

The Promise Reaffirmed and Further Defined (Genesis 13:14-17)

After Abram’s sojourn in Egypt, he and his party returned to the location between Bethel and Ai, the place where Abram first dwelled upon arriving in the land.

There, a dispute broke out between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsman of Lot’s livestock. Both Abram and Lot’s herds had grown so large that they land could not support their herds if they stayed together. The Canaanites and the Perizzite’s were in the land. Abram and Lot would have found it difficult to find land on which to graze their land.

Abram approached Lot and appealed to him as a brother that there be no strife between them and their herdsman.

And Abram graciously offered Lot the first choice of the land he could choose for his herds. Abram was acting by faith. He believed the promise that God made to him concerning the land. God had promised him all of the land. Thus, his priority wasn't the land, which would be his anyway, but preserving his relationship with Lot, his "brother." Covenantal loyalty was more important than the land that had been promised to him.

Lot chose what appeared to be the best land for himself. Yet, the grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence. This choice would later prove catastrophic for Lot and his family.

In response to Abram's faith, the LORD promised Abram and all his descendants all the land which he can see in any direction עולם ('ôlom), i.e. a long period of time in the future. Furthermore, the LORD promised Abram that his descendants (זרע; zérôa') will be "as the dust of the earth."

The LORD commanded that Abram walk about the length and breadth of the land.

Abram's response was to worship the Lord by building an altar once again.

Chapter 13 is chiastically structured; Note the structural parallels:

The section begins and ends with Abram in worship (13:1-4; 13:18; an inclusio)

Abram spoke to Lot and gave him the choice land; God spoke to Abram and gave him the whole land (13:8-9; 13:14-17)

Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the choice land; the LORD told Abram to lift up his eyes and see the whole land (13:10; 13:14-15).

After the strife is mentioned between Abram and Lot, the Canaanites and Perizzites are mentioned; after the strife is resolved, the Sodomites are mentioned (13:7; 13:13).

The LORD's Covenant with Abram (Genesis 15:1-21)

The LORD appeared to Abram in a vision, saying “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great” (15:1).

After the battle and defeat of Chedorlaomer and the three kings (Genesis 14:13-16), Abram may have been afraid of repercussions by these kings. The LORD’s appearance to Abram was meant to assuage any fear Abram may have had following the battle by letting him know that the LORD Himself was his shield his protection!

Then the LORD asserted that Abram’s reward would be very great!

What reward would have been on Abram’s mind? We know because of what Abram said in Genesis 15:2-3:

“²Abram said, ‘O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ ³And Abram said, ‘Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’”

Abram’s mind was on the promise God had made to him to have descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16).

The Hebrew word for reward in 15:1 is שָׁכָר (sâkôr) means “wages (for work),” HALOT, 1331). Because Abram had obeyed God by leaving Haran for the land God showed him, God promised him a great reward. Abram understood this reward as descendants. This same word is used by the Solomon in Psalm 127:3, “Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a **reward**.”

God had not given offspring to Abram up to this point, and Abraham and Sarah were advanced in years. Abram assumed, according to the custom of that time, that someone from his house would be his heir, and specifically Eliezer.

However, the LORD made it clear to Abraham that Eliezer would not be Abram’s heir:

“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’” (Genesis 15:4).

Further specification is given concerning Abram's descendants who are now described as numerous as the stars in the heavens (Genesis 15:5).

"And He took him outside and said, 'Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them. And He said to him, So shall your descendants be'" (Genesis 15:5).

Then the narrator makes a parenthetical or independent statement:

"Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

The NASB and many EVV translate this as a conclusion to what the LORD said to Abram in 15:4-5. In other words, the EVV communicate the idea that:

- (1) This is the first time that Abram believed in the LORD.
- (2) Abram believed in the LORD solely based on what the LORD said to him in Genesis 15:4-5
- (3) Based on this one time belief, the LORD declared that Abram was righteous from that point forward, an evangelical doctrine called positional righteousness.

However, that is not what the narrator is communicating in Genesis 15:6.

First, the grammatical and syntactical construction of Genesis 15:6 in no way indicates that this verse is a continuation of Genesis 15:4-5, and thus the first time Abram believed in the LORD. The narrator uses a specific grammar and syntax construction to indicate that this is either a parenthetical or independent statement, "Now Abram had believed God . . ." or Abram believed God . . ."

In either case, the point is that Abram believed in God prior to the events transpiring in Genesis 15:2-5. He believed God when he left Ur, when he departed for the land of Canaan, when he erected altars and called on the name of the LORD, when he gave Lot the choice land, when he rescued Lot, when he refused to take an of the spoils of war after the battle with the Kings.

The narrator is simply stating that Abram had demonstrated his belief in the LORD multiple times so far in the narrative. **Thus, God considered Abram righteous because he was righteous!** His actions by faith demonstrated that Abram was a righteous man. Therefore, God could enter a unilateral covenant with Abram guaranteeing the fulfillment of the promises He had made to Abram because Abram had demonstrated himself to be righteous, to be a believer in God.

Then the LORD reiterates again that He is giving Abram the land to possess it (Genesis 15:7).

Abram responds like we do when we are waiting on the LORD and from our perspective, we have been waiting for a long time or we are getting impatient while waiting. Abram wants reassurance of what the LORD had promised (Genesis 15:8).

So, the LORD formalizes the promises He made to Abram by means of a covenant that He “cuts” (קָרְבָּן; krt) with Abram unilaterally, indicating that He alone is the guarantor of the promises He has made to him (Genesis 15:8-21).

The writer to the Hebrews comments on this covenant God made with Abraham by stating:

“¹³For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴saying, ‘I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.’ ¹⁵And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. ¹⁶For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. ¹⁷In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, ¹⁸so 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” (Hebrews 6:13-18).

During the cutting of the covenant, we must note several important actions and statements:

- (1) The LORD alone, through the symbolism of the smoking pot and flaming torch, passed through the carcasses of the animals, indicating that He solely is the guarantor of the promises of the covenant and He is subject to death if He does not fulfill this role as the sole guarantor of the covenant.
- (2) Abram is merely a witness during the cutting of the covenant, as a deep sleep and the terror of great darkness fell upon him during the ratification of the covenant.
- (3) The LORD guarantees that the promises to Abram would be fulfilled, their fulfillment would be proceeded by 400 year period of enslavement and suffering. There would be challenging times ahead before the promises would be fulfilled.
- (4) Abram would die in peace, at a good old age, and would thus miss the 400 year period of suffering and distress.
- (5) The land promise is further extended from the Nile River to the Euphrates River, and include all the various pagan tribes that inhabited the land at that time.

We now offer a definition of the Abrahamic Covenant: The Abrahamic covenant is God's solemn everlasting guarantee that Abraham's descendants, that is to those descendants who are righteous through faithful obedience, would inherit the promised land even though the fulfillment would be delayed by a long period of enslavement and suffering, and the fulfillment of these promises would be the means by which all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Scope of the Covenant: The covenant that God made to Abraham promises him and his faithful descendants a nation—descendants and a land—who are to be a blessing to all the families of the earth, through his seed, who we now know is the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The participants of this covenant initially were the Jewish people but now include all who are descendants of Abraham by faith (Galatians 3:7).

The sign of this covenant is circumcision, a rite instituted in Genesis 17. Gentiles who are descendants of Abraham through faith, are not required to be circumcised, but keep the sign of the covenant they are currently under, the New Covenant, and thus the Lord's Supper.

The blessings of this covenant are for those who are righteous by faith, and are the blessings associated with Abraham's seed, the Messiah, now and during his future reign.

The curses of this covenant are the exclusion from the covenantal blessings for those who do not live by faith.

All of these promises made to Abraham ultimately point to the Kingdom of God on earth ruled by the Man, the King, Jesus Christ

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The Promised Descendant and the Sign of the Covenant (Genesis 17)

Genesis 17:1-18: God confirms the covenant He made with Abram and reinforces that His covenant is conditional, based on Abram walking blamelessly before God. The promises are expanded further to include:

- (1) Abram will be exceedingly fruitful (17:2, 6)
- (2) Abram's name is changed to Abraham, "father of a multitude," reflecting His new promise to Abraham that he will be a father of many nations (other than the nation that will inherit the land; 17:4-5).
- (3) Kings will come forth from Abraham's seed (17:6).
- (4) God promises to establish His covenant with Abraham and His descendants throughout their generations for an **עוֹלָם** ('ôlom) covenant "to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (17:7).
- (5) The land is now described as "all of the land of Canaan" for an **עוֹלָם** ('ôlom) possession (17:8).

The sign of the covenant is instituted by God as Abraham is commanded to circumcise every male eight days or older as an עֹלֶם ('ôlom) sign of the covenant (17:9-14)

God promises to bless Sari, Abraham's wife, by giving Abraham a son through her. Furthermore, Sarai's name is changed to Sarah (princess), as she will be a mother of many nations, and kings of peoples will come from her (17:15-16).

Finally, after Abraham makes a personal plea to God for Ishamel to be the promised seed, God makes it clear to Abraham that the son Sarah will bear, Issac and his descendants, will be the one whom God establishes His covenant, not Ishamel. While God promised to bless Ishmael by making him fruitful by becoming the father of twelves princes and a great nation, God's covenant will be through Issac.

C. Genesis 22:1-19: Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son, Issac, and He immediately proceeds to obey God's command. As Abraham was about to sacrifice the son of promise, an angel of the LORD stays Abraham's hand and provides a ram to sacrifice in place of Issac. Based on Abraham's obedience, God promises to greatly bless him by reiterating and expanding the promises previous made regarding Abrahams descendants by stating that they would be:

- a. Be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore.
- b. Possess the gate of his enemies.
- c. Bless all the nations of the earth.

D. Genesis 26:1-5: The LORD appeared to Issac, commanding him to stay in the land and not go down to Egypt, and in return He will establish the oath that He had sworn to his father Abraham. God reiterated to Issac the promises that He made to Abraham regarding the land, descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven, and the nations being blessed through Issac's descendants. God's extension of the covenant He made with Abraham to

Issac and His descendants was based on Abraham's faithful obedience because he "obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (26:5).

E. Genesis 28:10-15: As Jacob is fleeing the land and his brother, Esau, God appears to him in a dream, standing at the top of stairs reaching from the earth to heaven, as the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. God announces that the same promises God made to Abraham and Issac are now being passed on to him of a land, descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, and his descendants blessing all the families of the earth. God further pledges to Jacob that He will be with him and keep him, and bring him back to the land.

F. Romans 4

G. Galatians 3

H. Hebrews 6:13-20

I. Law of Moses

II. Davidic Covenant

III. New Covenant