

The Israel Story

Chapter 2 – The Covenant

“God’s promise to Abram and his descendants that they will inherit Canaan is based on God’s unilateral, unconditional, everlasting, blood covenant. Nothing that the Jewish people did or didn’t do, will or won’t do, can change that.

“The Jewish people were chosen by God to be His people, a special treasure above all peoples on the face of the earth. Though this special relationship was initially just with the Jewish people, it was never intended to be exclusive. All of mankind has been invited into this same relationship with God through faith in the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua (Jesus).” (Myers)

1. In Genesis 12:7, God makes it clear that He is giving the Promised Land to Abram’s descendants, it says, “*The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.”* Abram has some doubts about what God has promised. He is an old man and God has not delivered on a son. So God makes a covenant with Abram.
2. What is a covenant? It is a contract, agreement or pact. One example of a covenant that we encounter today is a marriage. Usually a covenant requires both parties to promise to do something to keep the contract in effect. If one side fails then the other side is not bound to keep his side of the bargain. This covenant is strange because God is the keeping up His side of the bargain. Similar to what we read in Genesis 12:1-3, God says “I will” but Abram does not say “I will”. This is a unilateral agreement. Only God made a commitment to keep the covenant. Its fulfillment relies only on God. Myers calls this “God’s unilateral, unconditional, everlasting, blood covenant.”
3. In Genesis 15, God made a blood covenant with Abram. God had him get animals and cut them in half except the birds. Deep sleep came on Abram. God gives him the land. God cut a covenant with him. God was the only one to pass thru the animals. It was a blood covenant but only God passed so it is unilateral. It was all God.
4. The covenant is contained in Genesis 15:17-21. It says, “*17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with*

Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— 19 the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20 Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.” Notice that the “Ites” lived on the land at this time. Whose land was it? God’s

5. People already live there. God is giving Abram and his descendants the land that belongs to someone else. This goes to God’s sovereignty. Does God have the authority to do this? I say, “He is God and I am not. So how can I question God?” Paul explains it better in Romans 9:10-18. As verse 18 says, *“Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.”* Or if you really want to be humbled, God could ask you as He did Job, *“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?”* The whole conversation between God and Job in Job 38 is humbling. All this to say, “God can give His land to whomever He wishes.” Myers adds two more scriptures to explain why it is ok for God to take the land from their current owners and give it to the Israelites.

2 Samuel 22:31 – As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.

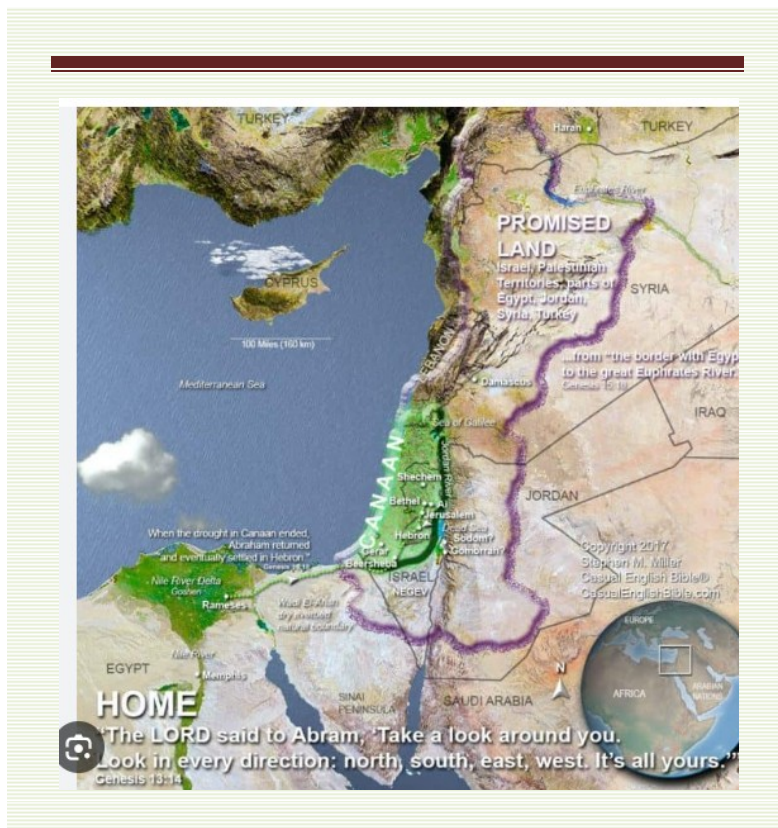
Isaiah 55:8–9 – “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

6. If you read about when Joshua leads the Hebrew nation into the Promised Land, you will learn that God has the power to back it all up. (Joshua 5 – 12) Just consider the walls of Jericho tumbling down. Joshua 12 lists all the kings defeated by God and the Hebrew nation, 31 in all.
7. Skip ahead to Genesis 17. Sarai and Abram have taken things into their own hands and Abram has fathered a son by Sarai’s Egyptian slave (Hagar). The son’s name is Ishmael. Abram is now 99 years old (Remember life expectancy was much higher then) and Ishmael is 13 years old. God restates the covenant with Abram (exalted father) and makes his name Abraham (father of a multitude). Sarai’s name is changed to Sarah. Both names are variations that mean “princess”.

8. Verses 7 and 8 say, *“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”* The key word in these verses is the adjective “everlasting”. There is no time limit on this covenant. The descendants of Abraham will have “everlasting possession” of the land that God has given them.

“God's intention is simple and clear. He has chosen a specific people and is giving them a specific land. However, due to the human element, the story itself becomes more complex. First, Abram’s wife, Sarai, decides it’s a good idea for Abram to bring forth descendants by marrying her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, which he does and as a result Ishmael is conceived and born. Then Abram, figuring that he and Sarai will never have their own children, asks God to pass on the covenant promises through Ishmael. God makes it clear that He has a different plan. His covenant promises would not pass through Abram (Abraham) to Ishmael, but instead through Abraham to Isaac, a son whom Sarai (Sarah) would bear.” (Myers)

9. Read Genesis 17:17-21. By choosing the descendants of Abraham through Sarah, God isn’t saying that this line is any better or more holy or that they will stay faithful to God than any other line. It just means God has a different purpose and plan for the descendants of Abraham and Sarah.
10. Look at the animosity between the Arabs and Israel today. The animosity has existed since the birth of Isaac. “The Jewish people are descendants of Isaac, whereas Ishmael is considered to be the father of the Arab people. Ultimately, this ancient animosity can and will only be healed and reconciled through the Messiah of all mankind, Yeshua.” (Myers)
11. The land promised to Abraham is much larger than the size of Israel today. The map below shows how much larger. The region is purple is the Promised Land and the area labeled is a Canaan is about the size of Israel today. Israel today also includes the desert in Negev to the south.



“Most scholars agree that it encompasses all of the Sinai Peninsula, part of Saudi Arabia, half of Iraq, all of Jordan and Lebanon, most of Syria, and a small area of Turkey.” (Myers)

12. It is interesting to think that Abraham did not have the benefit of the Bible or a long history of knowing God that we have today. God had to make the blood covenant to show Abraham that he could count on God’s promise. Today we can read Numbers 23:19 and know that God does not lie. We can look at the prophecies in the Bible and see that they came true. Numbers 23:19 says, *“God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”* The early Israelites could look back at the God’s deliverance out of Egypt and into the Promised Land and know that God does what He promised.

“Let’s not fast forward to current Middle East political issues. We’ll get there soon enough. The real question here is this: “Does God have the right to be God?” The answer to that is a resounding, yes. God not only has the right to give away occupied land, He has the right to do anything He wants to do, including to determine right from wrong, good from evil, and decide the eternal destinies of every living thing. That’s what it means to be God.” (Myers)

13. God reiterated the covenant that He made with Abraham to his son Isaac. God says to Isaac in Genesis 26:3, *“Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father.”* Two words stand out in this verse, they tell us that God swore an oath to Abraham and his descendants.
14. Abraham and his descendants had a special relationship with God. In Deuteronomy 7:6, Moses describes that relationship. He says, *“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”* Now does this mean that the Israelites were and are perfect? Only God is perfect. He spent millennia trying to keep them on the right path. Even though He punished them, He still loved them.
15. In Matthew 23:37 Jesus tells them just that He says, *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”* God still loved them, even when they whined in the desert for 40 years, when they created idols, when they wanted a king, when they . . . Read Hebrews 12:6 which is a quote from Proverbs 3:11-12. God disciplines those He loves.
16. Several times we have heard that because of our faith in Jesus then we are part of God’s covenant with Abraham. We are the children of God and the children of Abraham. Just a few weeks ago when we were studying Colossians 3 we read Galatians 3:26-29. *“26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

17. If God's covenant is not valid and alive today, then what does that mean for the rest of the Bible? The Book of Genesis is foundational. If it falls, it all falls.

Discussion Questions

- A. God described His covenant with Abraham as an everlasting covenant and the Land of Canaan as an everlasting possession of the Jewish people, yet many Christians do not believe that this covenant and this land promise are still valid today. Why do you think this is? If the Abrahamic covenant is no longer valid, what implication does that have regarding all the other biblical covenants and promises?
- B. By offering her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, to Abram as his wife, Sarah attempted to accomplish God's seemingly impossible promise of descendants through ingenuity, natural reasoning, and human effort. How well did that work out? Has God given you any promises that seem impossible? What are they? Have you tried, or have you been tempted to try to bring them to pass through your human efforts? How well has that worked out? What does God want us to learn from this?