

The Biblical Theology of

Missions

Part Two:

The Abrahamic Covenant

The Promise (Genesis 12:1-3)


1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;


I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;

*and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."*



mishpachah (mish-paw-khaw'); a family, i.e. circle of relatives; figuratively, a class (of persons), a species (of animals) or sort (of things); by extension, a tribe or people.



God's promise to Abraham is followed directly by proof of his unworthiness (i.e., his deception of the Egyptian king in Genesis 12:4-20). His election was based on grace and faith, not personal merit.

(Genesis 15:6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.)

The purpose of his election was to bless the whole world, but blessing redounded to him personally as well.

The Call to Go in *Missio Dei*


In order for Abraham to fulfill God's mission to bless all the peoples of the earth, it was necessary for him to leave his father and mother, his people, language, culture, and land and go to the land God would show him.

Jesus is the ultimate example of this divine pattern, and *the pattern still holds.*


The “Cutting” of the Covenant

Genesis 15:6-21

6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. 7 "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." 8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" 9 So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." 10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.



12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. 13 Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. 16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."



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"

Covenants in the Ancient Near East

Three Kinds:

- ❑ Royal Grant. A king's grant for loyal service. Perpetual and unconditional, passed down to descendants.
- ❑ Parity (David-Jonathan). Binding equals in mutual friendship or respect. Parties become "brothers."
- ❑ Suzerain-vassal. Between Great King (God) and a lesser king (Abraham).

Suzerain-Vassal Covenants

- ❑ The great king demanded absolute right of sovereignty and demanded total loyalty and service.
- ❑ The vassal must “love” his suzerain. Deut. 6:5
- ❑ The sovereign promised to protect the vassal’s realm and dynasty as long as the vassal remained loyal.
- ❑ The parties called each other “Lord” and “servant” or “Father” and “son.”
- ❑ The Suzerain offers his covenant to the vassal because of “hesed” or love or grace.

Hesed

Exodus 34:5-7

5 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love (hesed) and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

The Israelite Creed

This covenantal self-revelation becomes an important creed for Israel, repeated 6 times in the OT.

The phrase “hesed wə emeth” or “love and truth” is a common *hendiadys* in the Psalms.

Hesed and Truth

Hesed and Truth are found most completely in Jesus:

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

John 1:17

A Geopolitical Convention becomes the Main Structure of Biblical Revelation

- ❑ Old “Testamentus” and New “Testamentus” are Latin terms for New “Diatheke” and Old “Berith.” (“This is the new covenant in my blood . . .” — Jesus)
- ❑ God will go on to establish Suzerain-Vassal Covenants with Abraham in Genesis 17 (cutting the covenant in Abraham’s flesh) and with all of Israel in Exodus 20 (The Ten Commandments are a classic covenant document).

God's Role as Great King over All

The Kingdom of God that Jesus will come to proclaim later has been announced here as God takes on the role of a great earthly king in establishing his covenant with Abraham.

Other Missiological Passages in Genesis

Genesis 22:15-18

15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, **your only son**, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and *through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed*, because you have obeyed me."


One of Abraham's Sons will be sacrificed, one who is also God's Only Son, and through HIM, all nations will be blessed.

The Promise is repeated in Gen. 18:18, and 26:4 (to Isaac), and 35:11 (to Jacob).

Contextualization

God's use of the Hittite covenant form is one of the first examples of God's self-revelation in the language and cultural forms of concrete peoples in concrete places.

Throughout the Old Testament, every time the Hebrews encounter a new people and culture, new revelation comes from God that is understandable in the new culture.

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- The Covenant
 - The reinterpretation of Canaanite and Babylonian myths (like in Genesis 1)
 - The influence of Egyptian wisdom traditions and court customs
 - Daniel's prophecies reflect Persian ideas

New Testament Contextualization

- Greek linguistic influence from the Septuagint
- The Logos Theology of John 1:1
- Stoic diatribe in Paul
- Middle-Platonist ideas in Hebrews
- Paul's sermons in Acts
 - God's provision in agriculture (Acts 14)
 - The non-enforcement of Jewish law on Gentile Converts (Acts 15)
 - The unknown God (Acts 17)

Biblical Precedent

Every time Israel encountered a new people, God gave them more revelation. When we contextualize the Gospel in different cultures, we also gain new insights into the meaning of the Scriptures.

- Hyo theology in Korea

Syncretism is not Contextualization

- ❑ The adoption of the Canaanite high places as places for the worship of Yahweh instead of the Tabernacle/Temple was not appropriate.
- ❑ The shard from Kuntillet Aj-Rud.
- ❑ Gnosticism in the New Testament

Contextualizers must be careful not to falsify the heart of the Gospel.

Joseph, a Paradigm for Missionaries

- ❑ Moved from his country to another by the Will of God.
- ❑ Filled with the Spirit: Gen 41:38-40—*So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" 39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. NIV*
- ❑ Becomes an agent of salvation to Israel AND the Gentiles: Gen 50:20—*God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people. NLT*

The Primacy of Judah

Genesis 49:10

The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he comes to whom it belongs
and *the obedience of the nations* is his.

Israel's mission will be the salvation of the nations.

Israel's National Purpose

Exodus 19:4-6

5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although *the whole earth is mine*, 6 you will be for me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**'
These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

A Kingdom of Priests

What is the Biblical role of priests?

- To offer up sacrifices for the remission of sin. (Israel will become a suffering servant and its mission will be fulfilled by the promised Son of Eve, Abraham, Judah, and David. See Isaiah 53:1-6)
- To make intercession for the people, standing in their place for their atonement.
- To teach obedience to God's commands to all the people.

While Israel would have its own priests, the whole nation would become a Kingdom of Priests called share God's light to the nations.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

5 See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." 7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8 And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 28:9-11

9 The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. 10 Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. 11 The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity — in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground — in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you.

Isaiah 51:4-6

4 "Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: The law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. 5 My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. 6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

The Church as Royal Priesthood

I Peter 2:9

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Revelation 5:9-10

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be **a kingdom and priests** to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Romans 15:15-16

15 I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

The Prophethood of All

Numbers 11:25-30

25 Then the LORD . . . took of the Spirit that was on [Moses] and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied . . . 26

However, two men . . . had remained in the camp. . . Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. . . 28 Joshua . . . spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" 29 But Moses replied, ". . . I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Joel 2:28

28 And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit *on all people*. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Israel as a Nation of Justice

The concepts of forensic and social justice are far from absent in the Pentateuch. Part of God's intention for Israel was that it would model God's righteousness/justice to the nations (hagoyim, ta ethne).

Deuteronomy 24:17-18

17 Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

Major Social Concerns of the Covenant

 Personhood

 False Accusation

 Woman

 Punishment

 Dignity

 Inheritance

 Property

 Fruit of Labor

9. Fruit of the Ground

10. Rest on the Sabbath

11. Marriage

12. Exploitation

13. Fair Trial

14. Social Order

15. *Rex lex*

16. Animals

From NIV Study Bible, p. 271

“The Light” was not just hot air

The proof of Israel’s calling to be a priestly nation was to be demonstrated concretely in a just society. The prophets will later condemn the Israelites for oppressing the poor.

Compassion Ministry in Missions

Like Israel, our message of eternal salvation is enhanced by the formation of just societies. When we show concern for people's physical and social needs, we preach that God is concerned about their whole life.

After they are saved, they will be expected to live lives of integrity in every way. If we leave out concern for their whole lives in evangelism, we can hardly expect the commitment of their whole lives in discipleship. "If only the soul matters, it doesn't matter what the body does." This is the heart of gnosticism.

Politics? Social Action?

It is the wise and clearly stated policy of AGWM to demand an apolitical stance among missionaries and to encourage it among our sister national churches.

Never forget that as a foreigner, you do not have the rights of a citizen. (People sure do understand that on *this* side of the border.) But this does not mean that you cannot minister to social and physical needs in preaching the Gospel. But it is tricky and requires wisdom.