

# **GENESIS**

## **A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY**

***THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB***

**DR CHARLES VOGAN**

## THE COVENANT WITH ABRAM (*GENESIS 15*)

The idea of the Covenant is foundational to the entire Bible. We mustn't get confused about all the instances where the word is used, however. A "covenant" was simply an agreement between two parties; the word is used here in Genesis with Abram, it was used with Noah, it will be used again at Mt. Sinai and later in David's Kingdom. But that doesn't mean that because the word "covenant" is used, it refers to the *same* agreement developing across each of these historic occasions. Substitute the word "agreement" and you will see what I mean.

The Covenant with Abram was a special agreement that involved specific terms that address the fundamental problems of all mankind. The problems, remember, are sin and death. God's solution – worked out only in Abram's Family, which included Israel and later the Church – not only addresses the problem of sin but will totally eliminate it forever. And God will reverse the curse of death and give his children life – life with him.

The solution is going to be worked out all through Israel's history. And God's people have to understand that the same solution that Abram received from God forms the very foundation of the work of Christ – Christians are going to be heirs of the Covenant of Abram. There is no other way to read the entire Bible except in the light of the Abrahamic Covenant. So at the beginning, God ratified the Covenant – put his signature on the contract, so to speak – so that we will all know how serious he is about seeing this project through to the end.

**A Vision** – So many modern students of the Old Testament claim that the saints in Bible times, particularly early on as in Abram's day, couldn't possibly have understood the great spiritual issues that we now claim in the Church as our treasure in Christ. We are told that the saints in those days had a primitive, yet-undeveloped understanding of the "Gospel" – sort of a nebulous it-will-all-work-out-somehow feeling, but pretty much devoid of the content of the Gospel of Christ that the Apostles have given us.

That is so wrong. When the LORD came to his people in visions, as he did here with Abram, that means the spiritual world of God opened up to them so that they could see God – *our* God. At the very least, that puts Abram

in a different class from we who are in the modern Church, since he saw things that most of us (perhaps all?) have never seen for ourselves. Our faith is based on testimony of what *other* people have seen, such as Abram's testimony.

Second, the reason a vision was necessary is that physical senses can't apprehend a spiritual God, nor the kinds of things he shows us. Our senses are incapable of dealing with the currency in this transaction.

We have Apostolic testimony that Abram (as well as others in his time) saw such things as "the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God," and "a better country, that is, a Heavenly one." (Hebrews 11:10,16) I know this runs counter to prevailing theories of Old Testament progressive

revelation, but modern theories aren't in sync with Apostolic testimony. Our duty as Christians is to believe God's Word, not man's theories.

What Abram saw, then, were the timeless realities of the Gospel that God has for his people. His place in history doesn't categorically eliminate him from that possibility. Time is a factor of our physical creation; but it has nothing to do with the eternal Kingdom of God. The saints of the Bible were always lifted up by the Spirit into the presence of God (Hebrews 12:22-24), out of this world's limitations, to deal with the currency of Heaven – Christ himself – *which never changes*.

How much did he see of the Gospel? That we can't be sure of. But whatever we conclude about the content of his faith, there are two things to keep in mind: *first*, we aren't told *how much* he saw, so therefore we *can't* therefore conclude he didn't see much of anything! Logically this doesn't follow; he could have seen a great deal that the story doesn't tell us. Faith, after all, in order to be true faith in the God of the Bible, has to rest on a certain amount of data – that holds true from Genesis to Revelation. If we are children of Abram because of *our* faith, he must have seen enough of God's world to make him the Father of the faithful.

*Second*, Paul in particular claims that Abram heard the Gospel (Galatians 3:8), and that has to consist of a certain set of data in order to put meaning in the word.

**Don't be afraid** – We have to keep in mind that Abram had just moved over 500-1000 miles (depending on where Ur was located) away from his homeland (in those days, it was almost like the other side of the world!) and he was now wandering around like a stranger in

Canaan. He had no doubts that God would keep his promises, but he could see nothing in his circumstances that could make such things possible.

What he was afraid of was that this thing was bigger than he was, and in fact bigger than the circumstances would allow. It's one thing to look forward to a comfortable retirement plan for oneself; it's quite another thing to step into a plan for growing an eternal, world-wide Kingdom that would enrich and bless all of his descendants with the treasures of Heaven. There was nothing here in Canaan to support that hope, nothing in the landscape that would even justify thinking that he belonged here, or that he should even be trying this. This is not a small matter; it's a huge Project that would involve uncounted millions of people and draw from incomprehensible resources. Would Abram be equal to what God was requiring of him? Or (we could put it another way) Abram just put himself out on a limb, and he was feeling extremely vulnerable. He left home and family, he's wandering in a strange land among antagonistic strangers, and he is waiting for a non-existent "inheritance" that this unknown God has promised him out of the blue – all in his twilight years. In turning his back on the world so completely, is he now going to stumble and fall with nobody to help? With all the old support structure gone? At times all believers feel like that as the world taunts us with "Where is your God?"

**Shield and Reward** – But that's exactly where God wanted Abram. *There is nothing in this world for God's people*. The world that everyone is so desperate to stay plugged into, and that everyone is so totally dependent upon, is nothing to God. But in calling his people to follow him, he doesn't take all our support

structure away without replacing it with something: God gives *himself* to his people. Here is the heart of the restored relationship between God and man. God is shifting Abram's foundation from the world to Heaven's throne. Abram will get all that he needs for life by connecting with his God, not from the world system that everyone else around him depends on.

Consider what God is doing with Abram. He has led him away from his home, his security, his family. Everything in this world that Abram has known for 75 years is now behind him. What is in front of him? Not more of this world! God is drawing him to another world, the spiritual world of God. This world is darkness, and life here is sin and death. There is no hope here. But in God's world, there is the fullness of God himself – eternal life, eternal light, the wisdom and power of God. This is the “city” that Abram was enabled to see by his faith; this is his “very great reward.”

But the journey to that new world is going to be very difficult. There are no roads, no signposts, no helps at all. In fact there will only be hardships and suffering and discouragements and privation, along with myriads of enemies fighting him every step of the way. The task is to go from death to life, quite an impossible journey for a mortal.

So God will provide Abram with the resources to do the impossible. Not only will God fight his enemies for him, he will send treasures from Heaven when Abram needs them. Abram won't have to try to find what he needs from this world for his journey because he will have everything he will need as he follows God step by step. And God will give *himself* to Abram in the form of a

“shield.” This concept makes sense when we view it in terms of warfare – which is what this journey is going to be: spiritual combat the whole way. Heaven's treasures consist in the character and power and wisdom of God: his Names, his Ways, his Works, his Glory. There's an enormous treasury here to work with. In any particular situation Abram can pick up a resource from God and use it to protect himself from whatever this world throws at him, like putting up a shield between him and the danger. But the core idea is that Abram will be able to use God's fullness to fight through to his goal.

**LORD God** – Literally in Hebrew it is “My Lord, Yahweh.” (אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה) The NIV has “Sovereign LORD.” The Name LORD is the standard English way of translating the Hebrew word *Yahweh*.

Later we are told that, before Mt. Sinai, nobody called on God by his special Name of Yahweh. (Exodus 6:2-3) But in Genesis 4:26 we saw that people *did* start calling on him by that Name, so evidently we have to dig deeper here.

We are told specifically that Abram, as well as others in his day, called on God by this special Name (Genesis 12:8; 13:4; 16:13; 21:33; 22:14; 26:25). In Exodus 34:6-7, we have the definition of the Name.

The LORD, the LORD (Hebrew: יהוה יהוה – *Yahweh, Yahweh*), a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's

children, to the third and the fourth generation.

I believe the solution is that before the time of the Exodus, the particular name *Yahweh* was unknown to people. But the God whom the Name described was fully known to his people, such as to Abram. The Name tells us what he is like, the things he does, the things he promises his people and can provide for them. Abram, being the Head of the Family of God, would certainly see and know and learn about these essentials about the true God – because he lived by faith. In other words, he saw the God behind the Name.

**What can you give me?** – His question doesn't concern short-term benefits. If Abram is ever in need of protection or food or water, God can certainly provide those things easily enough. Rather he's thinking about his immediate problem of not having an heir. If what Abram has seen concerning the solution to mankind's long-term spiritual issues is true, then he knows he needs an heir who will receive and preserve God's treasures for the Family, down through the ages. Essentially he's saying that whatever Treasures that God may give him will be lost if there's no heir to preserve them. So Abram is thinking long-term, not just for his own immediate circumstances. And those Promises have to be more valuable than simply food and clothing and even land to live on. There is not only the physical well-being of the Family at stake here, but also the need for a new religious system, the presence of God among the Israelites, and spiritual treasures which will cause nations around the world to rise up and call God's people blessed for what God has provided through them. It's because of that long-range vision that he is concerned about getting his

Family started; without that, this calling to leave home and wander in Canaan all comes to nothing at his own death. So Abram is conferring with God on a high level as they make plans for the upcoming Family's welfare.

**Word of the LORD** – For the second time in this passage, we are told that “the Word of the LORD came to him.” Remember that Abram had a unique position that we will never experience: God spoke directly to him; we, however, can only read about it in the Scriptures long after the event. In fact, what God told *him* is the foundation for our faith – we also want what God first gave him.

And he's learning something about true faith: *it always starts with the Word of God*. Faith never invents data about God; it's not a matter of opinions or philosophy or speculation or even of our personal hopes and dreams. It is the certainty of what God said – nothing less and nothing more. Therefore, by necessity, faith is completely founded on revelation from God – God opens up things that we would never have seen on our own, things that are from another world, things that we couldn't hope to achieve or receive if all that we have is *this* world. Faith is based on the wisdom of God, a wisdom higher than the way this physical Creation works; it's based on the power of God, the power that created and maintains this world, and when necessary overrules and overwhelms this world to achieve God's ends. And faith is based on the unique goodness of God as he is more desirable than anything in this world, not only quantitatively but qualitatively. If we have God, we need nothing else – anything else would be as “rubbish” compared to the unique goodness and fullness of God. (Philippians 3:8) In other words, what faith does for us is

make us stunned and speechless with the vision of God; it would be madness to pursue the physical world's treasures after this vision. (Ephesians 1:15-23)

**Your son will be your heir** – Now we know how this treasure will be passed along – from father to son. It's going to be a Family who will inherit the Covenant promises. It will not be given to strangers.

There are several critical aspects to this Family concept: *first*, it's a very exclusive affair. What belongs to the Family, stays in the Family. Outsiders have no rights to the inheritance. Let me say that in a different way: *if you are not part of Abram's Family, you will get nothing from God.* That's why the Israelites were so insistent about proving their family genealogy back to Abram. Those who couldn't show their lineal descent were shut out of the Promises.

*Second*, because it's Family, there's going to be a close, intimate relationship involved – it's the father/son relationship that typifies the heirs of Abram. All who are descendants of Abram are sons of God, and will experience what only the son has privilege to. We are not to be like the angels who simply serve God; we are going to be brought into the Father's House and share his personal life. We know this by what Jesus has come to do, and where he intends to take us in the end. The Son has come to make us all sons.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

The Father/Son concept is the only way we can fully grasp the scope of what is going on in this historic transaction between God and man. The Father wants to give himself to his Son; the Son wants only the Father. The two share a spiritual life together, apart from and above this physical world. This is the kind of relationship that Abram was stepping into, what he was going to pass on down to his descendants. It would be an amazing solution to man's fundamental problems, and an unexpected eternal destiny.

**Faith and righteousness** – Righteousness is a very simple concept – it means being acceptable to God. Later in the Mosaic Law we will learn the full scope of righteousness, which is being *perfect*, in total conformity to the Law of God. "It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us." (Deuteronomy 6:25) The word has the idea of being "straight," perfectly in line with the standard. If we even deviate from the Law of God by one command, we will no longer be righteous. (James 2:11)

We all know, however, that none of us could ever achieve such a standard – we've already sinned against God and are now condemned by the Law as sinners, Law-breakers. Every human being in history has broken God's commandments in some way and therefore (by the requirements of that same Law) deserve death as a punishment. So what's to be done?

There are two ways to reach righteousness. One of course is to obey all the Law of God to his satisfaction – all 613 commands of the Mosaic Law. The Pharisees thought they could accomplish this, and yet Jesus told them

they were hypocrites and spiritually dead inside; they weren't even close to being righteous. The Apostle Paul warns us about trying to obey the Law to become righteous – it can't be done.

The other way is the route that Abram discovered in this passage in Genesis. God had chosen Abram to be his heir, his son. Their relationship was based on the Father/Son relationship inside the Trinity itself. Since the eternal Son is righteous and holy as the Father is, God was essentially offering Abram the same standing as the eternal Son. But he didn't require that Abram measure up to the Law at this point; simply by accepting the offer of the Father/Son relationship, Abram was now accepted as God's son and on that basis alone became acceptable to God. The details about making him "conform to the image of the Law" will get worked out along the way.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death ... in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:2,4)

It's God's call that makes a child of God; that's what Abram saw, and that's what he proceeded to live by. His obedience to this call marked him as a son of God: one who walks by *faith*. Faith is the ability to walk in the light of God's world.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12-13

So Abram saw the Heavenly City before him, he saw his Father, he saw his Inheritance, he saw the road he had to take to reach the House of God. And he got up and followed God on that road.

This is the relationship of the Trinity worked out in the heart of man. God gave the privileged position of the Son to Abram and his descendants, which is denied to the rest of humanity. It will get worked out in detail in the following years in Abram's life, in Isaac's, in Jacob's and in Joseph's. The entire doctrine of the Heir of God unfolds in the lives and histories of the Patriarchs first, who were the foundation for the rest of the children of God. And because Abram wanted *that* for himself and his descendants, he proved that he was the son whom God was looking for on earth. Therefore he was acceptable to God, or *righteous*. Only this kind of man, with this passion for God as his Father, will be brought into his presence.

**Give you this land** – This vision appeared to be a checklist of sorts, in which the LORD was bringing up the original Promises one by one and making Abram more informed about them. God had promised the land of Canaan to Abram and his descendants, and now he had something to add to the Promise – a solemn vow that Abram's Family can use as a kind of signature to the agreement.

"How am I to know that I shall possess it?" It was a valid question. Then, as now, people aren't going to move off the land simply because you tell them your God promised it to you. Every square mile was claimed by somebody. Communities, families, nations both local and far away, marauding bands, armies moving back and forth, the ebb and flow of historical

forces and peoples – all these factors have a way of making a single person's needs for a home and a garden turn into a vapor and a dream. Life here is very unreliable at best.

But when God claims a piece of land, suddenly a surveyor's stake drops down from Heaven to earth and the place becomes holy, given over to God and his purposes. *Nobody* is going to jump this claim. He is going to give it to his Heir *in perpetuity* – or at least as long as he has need of it. As a matter of fact, the present inhabitants *will* move out, or be killed, 400 years later when Abram's descendants show up to claim their inheritance.

Not only is the land now designated (at least in Heaven) for Abram's Family, God also has great plans for what is going to happen on this land. It will be the site of God's presence on earth. Sacrifice for sin, a knowledge of and a relationship with God, the resources for a new Creation, a protective shield against their enemies – all sorts of things will happen at this geographical spot that happens nowhere else on earth. It will be a shadow of what already happens in Heaven; it will be the pattern of what is going to happen in the Church spiritually. The land was not an insignificant matter in God's plans, so God agreed to address the *certainty* of it in order to provide a foundation for Abram's hopes.

**Cutting the Covenant** – Covenants, or agreements, have been made since the beginning of time. For us, a handshake will usually suffice to guarantee someone's good faith to do what he promised. But there are some agreements that require more than a casual trust. Even among men, they may agree to do certain less important things

under comfortable circumstances, but other things that are more difficult or painful they may find very undesirable to do, especially if the circumstances turn against them. So we add severe penalties to guarantee the contract.

This Covenant in Genesis 15 is an example of having to impose severe penalties. For the next 2000 years, millions of people will live and die under harsh circumstances and the terms of the Covenant will be put to the test over and over. So by cutting the animals in half, the parties involved are saying that they agree to the same treatment if they don't keep their side of the bargain. In other words, this agreement will be kept or they will die. Naturally one didn't enter into this kind of covenant unless one was dead serious about keeping his word. There were no police or courts or judges in that day to enforce the agreement, so each party was responsible to carry out the penalty on the other if necessary.

**Deep sleep** – The transaction which Abram was about to witness was a spiritual reality. Fallen man doesn't have the ability to experience the spiritual God; his physical senses aren't made for that. And if we look at other examples in Scripture, whenever God did appear on earth before man, the people involved dropped to the ground as though they were dead – it took their strength away, it shook them to the core. For example, Daniel was under such distress that he thought he was going to die. So it was probably a mercy, and was probably physically necessary, to put Abram into a deep sleep for this potentially deadly encounter with God's very presence. It certainly brings up images of the subjects of the king bowing down in humility as their king walks among them. Not often did God

condescend to walk among men on earth. Besides, God set aside Abram's physical senses so that he could experience God spiritually and "hear" his voice.

**Prophecy** – God of course foresees the future of not only Abram but also his descendants; he isn't limiting his plans to what he's going to do for Abram (which was actually a restricted subset of the full Covenant terms); he's planning for the next 2000 years of Israelite history.

At this point God speaks of just those events which will transpire until the Family of Abram comes back to claim the land of Canaan.

- Descendants in Egypt
- Slavery for 400 years
- God will punish Egypt
- The plundering of Egypt
- Abram will die an old man
- 4<sup>th</sup> generation will take Canaan
- The Amorites' sin

This prophecy includes some things that were no doubt a surprise for Abram. For one thing, that point about slavery in Egypt didn't sound very good. But God was planning on setting up a peculiar situation with Israel in Egypt in order to *deliver* them from their slavery. What he does to accomplish that will form part of the doctrinal foundation of his people for all time: their God delivers his people from their enemies (Israel from Egypt, Christians from sin and death) by his own power, according to his mercy and love for them.

Another interesting point in the prophecy was the plundering of Egypt. God seems determined to richly bless his people – usually at the enemy's expense. Abram experienced this already during his own stay in Egypt. His son Isaac

will experience it with Abimelech, Jacob will become fabulously well-off at Laban's expense, and Joseph is going to have all of Egypt at his feet. During the Exodus, the Israelites will take enough treasure away from Egypt to completely equip them for 40 years in the wilderness. For being strangers and aliens, they certainly won't have to worry about how they are going to survive from day to day, even in the middle of trying circumstances. When it comes to resources, "Your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all." (Matthew 6:32)

Remember that Abram was a Prophet (Genesis 20:7; Psalm 105:12-15) and would be privy to God's plans. The LORD was showing Abram key components to his Plan to bring the Family out of slavery and into their own homeland.

As he spoke by the mouth of his holy Prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy Covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Luke 1:70-75)

Prophets of God know these things; and it's their duty to make known the mind of God to succeeding generations.

**Sin of the Amorites** – Evidently the Amorites were the people to watch in this situation. They were a fierce, nomadic people who first centered in Syria, then swept across the Middle East causing great political upheavals for

centuries. They even founded Babylon in 1894 BC. In other words, at this point (2000 BC), during Abram's lifetime, they were beginning to expand into being the region's dominant power which would last until about 1600 BC. What is confusing is that the Scriptures speak of the Amorites in different ways – first as a culture of their own among the other cultures of Canaan, but also as a larger group of related tribes, such as the group of the five kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. (Joshua 10:5)

Given that they were to exert such a great power and influence over the entire region over time, it's no wonder that God targets them in particular: "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." The idolatry and wickedness of the Canaanites which God warned the Israelites about 400 years later in their conquest of the land would be based solidly on Amorite influence, since they would have been the formative power in the region. In other words, when Abram knew them, they were just getting started on creating Canaan into a land ripe for destruction by God's people. And of course Babylon itself was to become a huge problem for Israel in her future. Which means that God was discussing his military plans with his Prophet 400 years before the war.

**The Torch in the darkness** – We are told in Hebrews that "our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29) Abram saw both here – the *fire*, and the fire *consuming* (which produces the smoke). The combination of the two appears to be important: it conveys the actions that God takes among mankind. Later in Israel's history we will see God leading them by means of both.

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. (Exodus 13:21)

In fact almost every time someone had a vision of God, they saw this consuming fire. Fire is nothing to take lightly. It kills, it's incredibly painful, and even the presence of fire gets our attention right away. It also purifies in a way that hardly any other method can match. It's an immediate threat that we must take seriously or we will die.

Let's think about this. God doesn't make agreements over trivial matters. He works on, and he is passionate about, issues that are of primary concern to him. What is it that God is passionate about?

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8)

Over these issues, God will confront men everywhere, at all times. Over these issues, God will destroy the whole world in a flood in righteous anger. Over these issues, he will lead Israel out of pagan Egypt, give them his Law, put them in a land of their own and give them access to his throne of Life so that they don't have to sin anymore and die as a result. Over these issues he will even punish his own people. Over these issues the Son of God will die so that the children of God will live. Over these issues, God will destroy the entire world in fire and wrath.

In other words, what is foremost on God's heart and mind, what he is most passionate about, is what he is about to

do for Abram through the Covenant Promises. So as a guarantee of the certainty of the Promises, Abram is given a vision of the passion of God, the consuming fire driving the Promises to fulfillment. God would rather die than back out of this agreement.<sup>1</sup>

That's the irony of this kind of Covenant. The idea was that *Abram would have the right to God's life* if God didn't keep his end of the bargain. But then Abram lost all of his doubts (if he had any!) about God's intentions when he saw the fire, the wrath, the passion, the fury, the Judge, the holiness approaching him through the animals in that smoke and flaming torch. It was obvious now to Abram that *this* God was going to keep these Promises – the Covenant was the one thing that the holy God wants to see done on earth among men.

**The Covenant** – The ceremony involved in this type of agreement required each party to walk down between the two rows of divided animals and proclaim the terms that they agreed to do for the other party.

Notice that only God walked down through the animal halves. This means that what has to be done can be done *only* by God; man can't help here. He certainly isn't going to hand any of the work over to man, who is weak, ignorant of the whole picture, and still too much a sinner to be trusted with this critical task.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> And *that* is the story of the New Testament.

<sup>2</sup> Someone once objected that Abram's presence, even unconscious, was equivalent to his legal signature to the agreement. But no contract was ever declared legal when one of the responsible parties was unconscious! The point is *who* walked down between the animals; *that* act (not

The terms of God's agreement involve the following:

- ***I will give ...*** This work will be God's doing, from first to last. He is starting the work now, in Abram's lifetime, by arranging the situation in exactly the fashion that will produce the results he wants – including the lives and circumstances of the Patriarchs. By the time we get to Exodus, God moved again to bring his people out of Egypt, to Mt. Sinai, through the Wilderness and then in to conquer the Promised Land. He will repeatedly remind the Israelites that *he* will do the work; they need only follow him as he works his miracles for them. They must follow, they must obey, they must do their part – but it's God's wisdom and power that will open the doors for them every step of the way.
- ***To your offspring ...*** All this is for Abram's Family only. His Family will be characterized by traits that other nations in the world don't share: for instance, their faith (as Abram is going to learn as he walks with his God), their righteousness and acceptance before God, their testimony of God's hand among them giving them his wisdom and the riches of Heaven as their inheritance. Later we will read of special leaders through whom God does critical tasks necessary for their spiritual growth and correction – like Moses, David, and Elijah. All these are the benefits of being part of God's chosen people.

---

one's mere presence), along with his declaration, revealed the party bearing the burden of the responsibilities in keeping the terms of the contract.

- ***This land ...*** As we've seen before, the land will assume great significance. Here will be the presence of God on earth, and around him the Nation of God's chosen people who will gather around his throne and worship and serve him. Canaan will become known as "Bethel" – the house of God, the portal through which God does his work among men and nations, the source of the treasures of the Inheritance that goes out to the rest of the earth. Nations will come *here* to learn about the true God and experience his blessings. God considered it important to put the "surveyor's stake" on the property he is claiming, because he has plans for this property that he will no longer put off. The time had come to put his Plan into effect.

Notice in giving these terms out, God is essentially declaring war on the Canaanites: he lists them by name, as if to make sure he covers them all. We have to keep in mind this other river of humanity that the Bible doesn't spend much time on – the mass of humanity which were, after all, created in God's image and are therefore obligated to their Creator to glorify him. Just because the work in Abram's Family will assume primary proportions in the Bible doesn't mean that God has forgotten the nations; he never forgets sin. Their day of judgment is coming in due time.

One more thing we should notice here is that God specifically says, "*To your offspring I give this land.*" God is going to do this for Abram's descendants; Abram himself will possess very little of it. It's just another way of saying that this is going to take a while; we who know the story realize that it will finally

happen 400 years later. But that leads us to the question – can we really say that God made the Covenant with Abram if Abram didn't receive what was promised? The author of Hebrews can help us here.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

In other words, the Promises were bigger than Abram's immediate circumstances – *and Abram knew that*. He only got a foretaste of what would come. What would transpire during Israel's history here in Canaan as well as in the Church *started* with Abram; it would be his own Heir who would be the Son chosen to unite the entire Family, including Abram, before the throne of God, fulfilling the critical Old Testament concepts which were worked out after Abram's day. "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." (John 8:56) *Now*, of course, Abram is finally in Heaven enjoying the spiritual significance of the Covenant Promises: "Many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 8:11)

**The Point** – Here at last is God's answer to the crisis which man has presented him with.

Man, the ruler of this world under God, has brought down the condemnation of God upon his own head because of his ingrained rebellion against God's throne. This was never supposed to have happened; the ruin that it brought into the world has stopped the

entire Creation Project. Man and God are now alienated.

But now God is starting a new Family through Abram. He has selected a new beginning point on earth – Canaan – and he promises Abram’s Family a new kind of life: he is going back to the Father/Son model of Creation, but now they will live in the very presence of God as he lives among them. And instead of relying on the (now obsolete) physical/spiritual connection between God and man from Creation, Abram and his descendants will now live by faith; that is the Family characteristic, and God accepts (declares righteous, with the “right” to come before him) only the faithful. And while God is setting up

this Family, he doesn’t forget the rest of humanity – their doom is tied directly to the destiny of Israel, either for good or evil. And God himself is going to see this Project through to the very end; instead of relying on man, he will provide the power and wisdom to achieve all of it.

He is clearly showing us the meaning of his special Name by which all of his children shall know him: “I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” With one hand he prepares for the demise of the wicked, and with the other he cares for his special Family.

Copyright © 2018 Charles R. Vogan Jr.  
All rights reserved

Scripture quotations (unless otherwise noted) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## **Genesis: A Theological Commentary**

**ISBN 978-1547101634**



**Ravenbrook Publishers**

*A subsidiary of*  
**Shenandoah Bible Ministries**

**[www.Ravenbrook.org](http://www.Ravenbrook.org)**

**[www.Shenbible.org](http://www.Shenbible.org)**