

The Permanence of Abraham

Genesis

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So glad that you are all here. It's a real encouragement to have so many faithful people coming week after week for the simple teaching of God's word and I'm delighted to be a part of that with you. What we've been doing over the past several weeks is we started a survey of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through the book of Deuteronomy, and we spent a little more time on Genesis than we will on the other books because Genesis is so foundational and one of the things that I wanted to kind of bring out for you is to see the importance and the strategic place that Abraham has in all of the Scriptures and we're going to finish that off this evening. God's dealings with Abraham are central to the overall biblical message and this is the third message, the final message on Abraham and I wanted to just kind of give you a sense, remind you of what the titles of these messages are, maybe introduce you to the titles of these messages for the first time, but just a way to kind of think through with three or four simple words the role of Abraham and to help us lay a foundation for it. We started out with the prominence of Abraham, that was on October 7, and just to recognize as we went through a lot of different Scriptures, that Abraham is a prominent figure in the biblical narrative. You know, the Old Testament and the New Testament hinge in some ways on Abraham. Matthew 1:1, Jesus Christ is the son of Abraham, and so Abraham, in a sense, leads us into Christ who, of course, is the preeminent figure of Scripture. So you have the prominence of Abraham. Last week we looked at the promises to Abraham and if you don't remember anything else, if this Old Testament stuff is kind of new to you, what I would encourage you to kind of develop a groove in your mind to go back to again and again is simply that Abraham is prominent in the Scripture and God made promises to him and that leads us into this evening. We won't rehearse everything that we've studied under those other rubrics but tonight we're going to see the permanence of Abraham. So the prominence of Abraham, the promises to Abraham from Genesis 12, and then tonight we're going to look at the permanence of Abraham.

The promises that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12 were personal to Abraham, they were national for the nation of Israel, and they were also universal. God's promises to Abraham were the declaration of his intention to bring blessing to every tongue, tribe and nation in all of the world. That's really significant and there is a unifying dimension to this study that helps us understand what's going on in the rest of Scripture and that's really the big, big point, is that I want you to be able as we continue to study together, for you to be able to have a strategic grasp of the Bible and to be able to kind of think your

way through it from Genesis to Revelation. That's what we're building over time, and why that is significant is that if you have that kind of strategic grasp of the Bible and you're continually growing in the development of a biblical mind, you are going to be a well-established Christian able to weather the storms of life and be able to be a producing son of God in enemy territory, as Jim Elliott described his aspirations to be back in the 1940s or 1950s before he was martyred in Ecuador. We want to be producing sons of God in enemy territory and the only way that we can do that is if we have a good solid grasp of the Bible. We see the whole plan of God, we see the big picture, not simply how the Bible helps us get through our particular day or our particular difficulties. So that's the overall goal here and to understand something about the permanent nature, the eternal nature of God's promises to Abraham, will help us do that and that's why we're here this evening.

What we're going to do is we're just going to take a very quick look back and then we're going to take a look forward. Let's do this, two points for tonight's message, and what we want to do here is we'll just call this first point: the promises summarized. The promises summarized. We can crystallize the Genesis 12 promises to Abraham into three main areas. We saw it in a big picture and we looked at it in detail last week, this week we want to just kind of summarize things so that we can move forward in an effective way.

First of all, what are the promises to Abraham? First of all, there is the promise of the seed. The seed, s-e-e-d. God promised biological descendants to Abraham and I'm using Abraham instead of going back and forth with Abram and Abraham; we know that originally his name was Abram, God changed his name later on. God promised biological descendants to Abraham that would form a nation of people physically related to him. Genesis 12:2, go back there with me, if you would. God told Abraham, "I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great." This idea of a nation is tied to the idea of giving Abraham a seed. Look at verse 7, Genesis 12:7, "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land."

Now, it's very interesting and Scripture makes a big point about this particular word, that word that is translated as "descendants." You may have a marginal note in your Bible like I do that says literally it's just the word "seed," singular. That word there is a collective singular noun that has nuance in the way that it can be used. Think about it this way, I'm not a farmer nor am I the son of a farmer but I think we know just enough to be able to let this illustration work: we could talk about, if we're thinking about agriculture, we could think about a seed as being a singular seed out of a plant, just one seed out of an envelope of flower seeds or something like that. You could use the word "seed" that way to refer to one single individual unit of seed. We've also got the sense in our English language of a farmer could say, "I need to go buy seed," using the same word in the singular but he's talking about needing pallets of things to be able to plant his crop. And so "seed" can be used in a very singular sense or it can be used in a collective sense to refer to a whole group of things. That's what's going on in a similar way with this word "seed" and it's biblical usage. It can designate a whole line of Abraham's descendants or it can be used to one person who represents the whole group. Okay, now follow me with this here: as you read through Genesis, you'll see that it definitely has the sense, it is used in a way to refer

to the many physical descendants of that came from Abraham in order to form the nation of Israel.

Look over at Genesis 13:15 and we're seeing some of these passages for the second or third time in this little series here. This idea of the seed is really crucial to be able to get the whole biblical message; this is why we're talking about it. In Genesis 13:14, "The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants,'" the word "seed," I'll give it to your seed, to your descendants, "forever." Now, the word "seed" is singular there in the original language but you can see that it's referring to a large group of individuals by what goes on in the context in verse 16. He says, "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered." God is promising Abraham that from his loins would come such a great line of descendants that they will be impossible to number using hyperbole and referring to, "If you can count the dust of the earth, that's what your descendants will be like." This is a phenomenal promise just in a physical ancestry since.

And you can see the same idea repeated in Genesis 15:5. All we're doing is quickly summarizing the promises that God made to Abraham as a means of review and setting the stage for the rest of what we want to say this evening. Genesis 15:5, God "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.'" "So shall your seed be. Abraham, there is going to be a nation of people that come from you even though you're just a man, a single man, single in the sense of one solitary man, not an unmarried man, you're one man married to a barren woman right now. This is what I'm going to do. This is what I promise you. This is one of the many ways in which I am going to bless you."

So we see that many physical descendants God promised to Abraham and yet as you continue in the study of the Scriptures, you find that there is a sense in which Jesus Christ is the ultimate seed with a capital "S" to Abraham. Look over to the book of Galatians 3:16. You can keep your finger in the book of Genesis because we'll just touch on this for just a moment. Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us - for it is written, 'accursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'" So Christ is the one who delivers us from the condemnation of the law through his bloody sacrifice of his life to appease the wrath of God. Why did that happen? Verse 14, "in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham," the blessing that God promised to Abraham, "might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." So Christ becomes the means by which these promises which were originally made 2,000 years earlier to Abraham, "I'm going to bless all the nations through you," here now Christ is being explained as the one who gave his life so that that blessing promised 2,000 years earlier might come to the Gentiles.

And in Galatians 3:15, Paul goes on to say, "Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it." Now look at this, verse 16, this is what's pertinent

for tonight, "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ." So what the Apostle Paul is saying is that while there was a sense in which the seed referred to the many descendants as we saw from the Old Testament language, he's saying that the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of a seed to Abraham was found in the Lord Jesus Christ and that singular nature of the word "seed" allows for that final fulfillment to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. So while there is this multiplied seed in the physical descendants because it's a collective noun that is used, there is the ultimate fulfillment where we see the ultimate Seed, capital "S," of Abraham as Jesus Christ and that becomes the ultimate fulfillment and it's through that final seed, as it were, that God delivers on the promise to bring blessing to all the nations of the earth.

This is massive. This is huge. This is phenomenal in the breadth of what God had in mind when he was first making promises to Abraham and that's what we want to see is that God purposed way back in Genesis 12 and expressed his purpose, his ultimate establishment of his purpose was before time began, but we see as he begins to unfold his revelation to mankind, when he's making these promises to Abraham, we're talking about something that shoots through all of human history and delivers way into eternity as well. This is no minor issue. This is no side matter that we have gotten derailed on. We're not missing the forest for the trees here. We're seeing the forest, the great forest of the trees of God's promises and intentions to bless mankind.

So we see that God promised a seed to Abraham and he fulfilled that promise with a literal nation and he also fulfilled that promise ultimately in Christ. God gave many descendants to Abraham through his loins and in the outworking of that ancestral line came the Lord Jesus Christ who was the ultimate goal of the promise to Abraham in the beginning and became the means by which God's promises to bless the nations would be fulfilled. And you and I now, here's what I want you to see, here we are 4,000 years after the time of Abraham, here we are, you and I sitting here, in my case standing here but you know what I'm saying, here we are gathered together in this room on the eastern part of Cincinnati and here we are on the receiving end of what God promised to Abraham 4,000 years ago. We are in the flow of the outworking of an eternal plan of God which he promised and he has been working out the implications and guaranteeing the fulfillment of that promise through his perfect providence in Christ and now to us millennia later. And when you start to grasp something of the greatness of the purpose of God and his power to work out his purpose over time, it humbles you, it encourages you, it makes you realize this is something far bigger than our generation. We are in the flow of the divine purpose that God initiated in time with Abraham 4,000 years ago.

Now, go back to the book of Genesis because we're only summarizing here and that's as much for my remembrance as it is for yours, to remember what tonight is about; tonight is about the permanence of Abraham. Now, God promised Abraham a seed, there was going to be a nation that would come and those people would need a place to live. They would need a place to plant their lives, a place for their feet, so to speak. They needed land and the promises to Abraham included a promise of land. Look at chapter 12, verse 7 again. Again, we're just kind of breezing through this really rapidly. This is a survey,

not a final exposition for all time. Going back to Genesis 12:7, "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'" He's obviously talking about physical real estate. This is not a promise of, "I'm going to establish a spiritual entity down the road for them." They needed land and that is the way that Abraham would have understood this promise. He's standing on land, God tells him to look about and he says that, "This is the land that I will give to your descendants."

Go back to the same passage we were looking at in Genesis 13:14 as well. This is all about geography. Genesis 13:14, "The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are.'" It's a geographic point and he says, "Now look out northward and southward and eastward and westward. Look out at all of what you see, for all the land which you see," verse 15, "I will give it to you and to your descendants forever." So geography is promised in this covenant which God made with Abraham. Look at verse 17 and you can multiply these references to the land a hundred fold or more as you study the Old Testament. Verse 17 of chapter 13, "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." It's a promise of land. One last time, chapter 15, verse 7, God said to Abram, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." So God promised Abraham, "A nation will come from your loins and I will give land in your name, as it were, so that that is where they will live and that's what they will possess." If there's going to be a nation, they are going to need a land upon which they can be established and as you go through and see them conquering in Joshua, the nature of the land, you see that God fulfilled that promise.

So a nation, a seed, land to support that nation is promised, and then finally, this is our summary of the promises, the seed, the land and finally the universal blessing. The universal blessing. Genesis 12:3. Turn back there with me, if you would. Genesis 12:3, we've seen it so many times it's almost redundant to repeat it but this is too important not to be clear about it. "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 will be blessed." Universal blessing. Worldwide blessing comes through Abraham. Chapter 18, verse 18, if you would, "Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed." Once more, Genesis 22:18, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." And so as we talked about briefly last time, Abraham's loins gave birth to a nation; God promised land to support them; and through Abraham's descendants universal blessing came. The Jews became the vessels of God's revelation through their prophets and through the psalmists. Supremely they physically produced Jesus Christ through the physical birth through Mary. People from every tongue, tribe and nation will receive eternal salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we see that, we see how God puts all of this together, there is this nation that comes, this nation produces Christ, this nation were the recipients and the ones who distributed the revelation of God, this is how God has blessed all the nations through the seed of Abraham. So we see the promises are just so far-reaching in their scope and, you know, you start to see things like this in the Scriptures and it just really gives you a taste for even more of the word of God to see how much, this isn't a great word, I don't know how

else to express it at this moment, what an infinite genius God is. What kind of mind is able to conceive of a plan like this? What kind of power then executes that plan over the course of subsequent millennia without fail with utter certainty in its accomplishment? How great is this God whom we worship? How great is this God who has revealed himself in this book, the 66 books of the Bible? As we start to see these things and just get our sense of God expanded and deepened, it gives us a heart that should be full of awe and a desire to worship him particularly when we realize now as Christians in this age that he included us in the plan. It's phenomenal.

Now, that's the promises summarized: seed, the land, the universal blessing. Now, point number 2, let's look at the promises secured. The promises secured and this is where we talk about the permanence of the promises that God made to Abraham. Specifically what we're saying is that the promises that God made to Abraham were unconditional by which we mean that God purposed to carry out these promises based on his own intentions, it was not based on how well the Israelites would cooperate with him. He was going to do this over time because it was his intention to do so and so the promise is secure and we are going to see this.

God promised these blessings to Abraham in what we call a covenant. Go back to Genesis 15:18, the passage that I read earlier at the start of our time together. Genesis 15:18 and we'll start to accelerate now a little bit. Genesis 15:18, I like for you to see where these terms come from in the Scriptures. It would be faster to just kind of summarize and say that this is what the Bible says but I don't like to do that. It makes the messages go longer but I want you to see in the text for yourself where these things come from so that when your teacher isn't around, you're able to go back and you're able to see it from the Scripture and you've got it on your own biblical authority that you can see with your own eyes where it comes from rather than just depending on the word of a man who says that's like it is. It reminds me whether it was a day ago, today or yesterday, I know I was reading where the pope of the Catholic Church was saying, "Well, evolution is consistent with the Bible," and all of this stuff. Well, what's his authority for that? It's because he said so. Do you know what? That's not good enough. He doesn't have any authority to say something like that. We have to compare these things with the Scripture and that's what we're trying to do. We're not trying to be some kind of miniature pope here, our authority is the Scripture and the Scripture alone and that's why we take the time to read the text when we preach; that's why we take the time to look them up is so that we all understand, so that we all are on the same page that it's about the authority of the Bible, not about the authority of someone else. That's what matters. It's the only thing that matters and that is where your faith will ultimately alone be grounded and the more you understand the Scriptures, the more that you can look it up in your own Bible with your own fingers and see it with your own eyes, the stronger a Christian you're going to be and that's what we're trying to do at Truth Community is to produce strong Christians who can be a good witness in this sinful world. That's the whole point. That's why we do this like this.

Now, God promised these blessings to Abram in a covenant. I guess that was a little tangent that I just went on. Look at chapter 15, verse 18, "On that day the LORD made a

covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land.'" What is a covenant? Well, let's just try to make this as clear and simple as possible. A covenant is an agreement between two parties that contain promises that are confirmed through an oath or a ceremony. It's a term that helps us understand God's promises to Abraham and here's the thing, by virtue or by lack of virtue of man's sin he was separated from God; he had no means by which he could approach God; he was under judgment; he was separated from God and without hope in the world. God uses a covenant with Abraham in order to establish the means by which men would be able to approach him. Abraham believed the promises of God; he was declared righteous as a result of that; he became the friend and the servant of God as we saw two weeks ago, three weeks ago. God uses this means of a covenant which was familiar in the times in terms of, "This establishes how I will deal with humanity," is the idea.

Now, a one hour message like this is going to involve a lot of oversimplification but we need to try to at least introduce some difficult concepts so that we have a framework that we can come back to in the future as we continue to study God's word together over the years. Here's the question on the table for tonight: God made these promises of seed, land and universal blessing to Abraham, were these promises things that God determined that he would do on his own that depended on him for fulfillment, in other words, were they unconditional promises that he was going to carry out no matter what, or were they promises that were subject to revocation based upon whether Abraham and his descendants obeyed him or not? Would God who made these promises of seed, land and blessing, would God revoke them if Abraham and his seed blew it, if they rejected him later on? That's what we're trying to grasp and it's a major theological issue that affects the way that you view the church, the way that you view Israel; it has impact on the way that you view the end times, what we call the study of eschatology, the end times.

Now, we're not going to get into all of that because that would be contrary to trying to do a survey but I want you to see a few things here. There are some good theologians in some areas of theology, men whose work I respect and have profited from who I regard as fellow Christians, there are some good theologians who believe that God's promises to Abraham were conditional so that they were subject to being revoked. And here's what one of them said as you watch the unfolding of biblical history after Abraham and through the course of the Old Testament and into the New, one theologian said this, quote, "The mass of Israelites forfeited their citizenship in the commonwealth by refusing to accept the Messiah," talking about when the Jews rejected Christ and crucified him in the New Testament. Continuing the quote, "It may seem harsh to say God is through with the Jews but the fact of the matter is that he is through with them as a unified national group." What is he saying? He's saying that when God promised Abraham that he would have a nation, that that only lasted up until the time of Christ and when the Jews rejected Christ and crucified him, that they forfeited their promises, God severed the promises to Abraham about having a nation and those blessings that were promised to Abraham are now fulfilled spiritually in the church.

So according to theologians like this and others like him, God set the nation of Israel aside. The church now replaces Israel as the recipient of the blessings of the Abrahamic

covenant. I cannot accept that. The unconditional nature of the promises which we are about to see to Abraham, means that no subsequent disobedience by national Israel could forever invalidate God's promises or forfeit those blessings forever. God made promises that he intended to keep. That's what we're going to see in the time that we have remaining here and while what we are about to see will be an oversimplification, I want to show you why we believe that God's promises to Abraham were unconditional so that we still expect God to fulfill future promises to national Israel in a time that is still future to us today. That's what we're talking about here. Why would we believe that? You know, it sounds at one level, it sounds so logical. "Well, they rejected the Messiah. Well, of course God would cast them aside." So it sounds logical but I think when you fully walk through everything that Scripture says and you walk through the Old Testament from beginning to end and see it playing out into the New Testament as well, that becomes a completely unacceptable position to hold. It has implications for what we think about the character of God, the faithfulness of God, it has implications for your own assurance of salvation and so we want to spend just a little bit of time on this.

I think you're in Genesis still, I'm going to give you five reasons why we believe that these promises are unconditional. First of all is this, we'll just kind of walk through these rather quickly. First of all, is the context of Genesis 1 to 11. The context of Genesis 1 to 11 and this one is really persuasive to me, although it's going to be quickly stated here. Back in the ancient past when we first started this study on Genesis, we talked about the cycles of sin, judgment and grace that were established. This is so important. If this was the only argument, which it's not, but if this was the only argument, I would still find it compelling, the context of Genesis 1 to 11. When Adam sinned in the garden and God cast him out, we saw that God made an unconditional promise, "I will send a seed to crush the head of the serpent." Adam sinned, God promised a seed that had nothing to do with Adam's response. It was simply a declaration of his purpose, "This is what I'm going to do." Cain sinned in Genesis 4, God gave him a mark to protect him. The world sinned prior to the flood, God gave the rainbow as the sign that he would never flood the world again. Unconditionally giving these gifts and promises to people who had sinned against him, God said, "This is what I am going to do," and it was not subject to revocation. The promise to Adam to send a seed that would crush the head of the serpent was not subject to revocation based on what Adam's behavior was after God declared the promise. God gave that sign, whatever it was, to Cain that he carried with him throughout the rest of his life. To this day, we still see the rainbow in the sky as the sign that God is keeping his covenant never to flood the entire world again, and we sure can't say that it's because the world has been good enough to have deserved that continued favor from God. God just made a promise out of his goodness to reserve judgment, to hold back that which he could have done, and he just did it unconditionally. Just because he's good and just because he's gracious, God did it.

Now, watch this, this is really compelling to me: Adam, chapter 3; Cain, chapter 4; the flood, 6 through 9; Genesis 10 and 11 and you see the Tower of Babel come, the intent of their heart is evil and God sends them out and judges them. What we said back a month ago was that in that same line after you get the declaration of judgment on Babel, that's when Abraham is introduced into the Scriptures. Unconditional grace to Adam.

Unconditional grace to Cain. Unconditional grace to the world in the time of Noah. And now all of a sudden you're going to inject something that's utterly conditional and subject to revocation? That doesn't make any sense at all. That would be totally contrary to the pattern that God had established. So we have seen the pattern of God's dealings and what you absolutely expect as you read Genesis 1 through 11 and come into Genesis 12 is you expect God to continue to deal with unconditional grace with those that he extends his favor to. That was the pattern that was established: unmerited favor secured by a unilateral promise from God. And so the context of Genesis leads us to expect an unconditional promise.

Now, let's look at God's call in Genesis 12. The first aspect, why we believe these promises are permanent, the context of Genesis 1 to 11. Secondly, let's look at God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12. His call to Abraham in Genesis 12. The Lord said to Abram, Genesis 12:1-3, just look at the "I wills" in this passage. "The LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house,'" which Abraham did, "To the land which I will show you." So Abram did what God said and now look what clenches it, what flows from all of this. God says, "I will make you a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great; you will be a blessing; I will bless those who bless you, the one who curses you I will curse. In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." I will. I will. I will. This will. This will. This will. There are no contingencies on it. God is saying, "This is what I'm going to do." Now listen, it has to be that way because this idea didn't just pop into God's mind in Genesis 12 as something that he hadn't thought of prior to this, God with the covenant with Abraham is working out the eternal purpose which he established before the foundation of the world. God knew what he was going to do. He declared his intention in the subsequent 4,000 years. It has been God delivering on his promise to do this. "I will. I will. I will." He does not condition these promises on Abram's obedience. He says simply, "I will do these things for you." Beloved, it is gracious just like his prior grace in Genesis 1 to 11.

Thirdly, why do we believe that these promises are unconditional? Thirdly, the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15. I read that passage earlier. Turn over to Genesis 15. In ancient times, covenants were sometimes ratified by dividing an animal into two pieces and having both parties walk between the pieces. It was a sobering time. It was a sobering ceremony to say something serious is going on here. Blood is shed and as you walk through this sacrificed animals split on both sides and you walk through it, the sense of that ceremony is, "May what happened to these animals happen to me if I don't keep my promise. May I be sacrificed, may I be murdered if I don't keep my promise here." Blood sealed the covenant and the somberness of walking through and seeing death on either side and coming out on the other side is the party's intention, "I will keep my promise." And normally when it's a covenant involving promises and obligations by both parties, both of them would walk through so that there was something of a formal oath given, calling down imprecation upon themselves if they violated the covenant. "May what happened to these animals happen to me if I don't keep my promise." When God ratified the covenant with Abraham in that passage that I read earlier, God alone walked through. Abraham did not follow him.

Look at verse 12 of Genesis 15. Genesis 15:12, "Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.'" Now look at what happens in verse 17. You remember earlier we read about how Abraham cut the animals in half and set them on either side. I didn't read that just now, we read it earlier. Verse 17, "It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch," this is a manifestation of the presence of God, "which passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land.'" Abram didn't follow. God was the only one who walked through those pieces indicating that the burden of fulfillment rested on God alone.

The great Bible teacher S. Lewis Johnson said this about this passage and I quote, he said, "The meaning is clear. This covenant is not a conditional covenant in which certain duties rest finally upon man alone. God undertakes to fulfill the conditions himself thus guaranteeing by the divine fidelity to his word and by his power the accomplishment of the covenantal promises." What he's saying is that when God alone walked through and Abram didn't follow, God is saying, "This one is on me. This depends on me. I am the one who is guaranteeing the fulfillment of the promises of the seed, the land, and the universal blessing." So the covenant ceremony shows that it is an unconditional covenant that God has made with Abraham.

Now, fourthly, we've said Genesis 1 to 11, the promises in Genesis 12, we've seen the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15, now fourthly, why are these promises secure? Why do we believe that this covenant with Abraham is something unconditional? Well, fourthly, we're going to see the Old Testament ratification of the promises. The Old Testament ratification of the promises and we're only going to look at a couple of passages. To see this, you'd study Isaiah through Malachi, among other Scriptures to see this. But the Old Testament overflows with the recognition that God plans to keep his promises to national Israel. The prophets are especially filled with assurances that God would restore them; that God would not break his promise; that God would fulfill what he had promised to Abram.

Look at Jeremiah 31. I think this passage is very poignant, very powerful. Jeremiah 31:35, "Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts."

I'm not sure what's happening here with my mic.

Verse 36, "'If this fixed order departs From before Me,' declares the LORD, 'Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.'" God swears,

as it were, by the order of the planets, the order of the skies and the stars and says, "As long as you see this fixed order going on, you can know that my promises to national Israel are still in effect." Did we have a 24 hour day today? Sunrise, sunset? Are we still able to mathematically calculate the orbit of the planets today here in the year 2014? Then God's promise for Israel to be a nation favored and in his sight is still in effect. He hasn't broken the promise. We still see the orbits and we look and we say, "God's promises are still in effect."

Verse 37, "Thus says the LORD, 'If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done.'" He says, "If you can get a tape measure long enough to measure one end of the universe to the other, if you can search out the foundations of the earth, that's when I'll cast out Israel. That's when I'll break my promise to have them as a favored nation." We haven't done that yet, Hubble Telescope notwithstanding. The heavens can't be measured. God can't break his promises to Israel.

Look over at Micah 7. By the way, some time, probably on Tuesday in our midweek studies, we'll do a series of studies on the minor prophets, Hosea through Malachi. I have many of those things prepared already. But when you study the minor prophets, what you see over and over again is God judges them for sin and then he promises later on, he says, "But I'm going to bring you back. I'm going to restore you. You'll go into exile, you'll be sent away but I'm going to restore you." And it's done in a way and those promises are done in a way where you realize that there is still fulfillment future to us today. You look at some of the things that are said in Zechariah 12 through 14 and you realize that those things haven't happened yet. Habakkuk speaks about how all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord from sea to sea, Habakkuk 2:14. That hasn't happened yet. So we realize that God has a future for national Israel because he has promised it to them, not because they deserve it.

Now, we've got more to say about that but what I want you to see now is in Micah 7. Micah is tucked just before the book of Nahum and after the book of Jonah. Micah 7, and I love this passage, verse 18, "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us," speaking to the nation of Israel, "He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob," watch it here, "And unchanging love to Abraham, Which You swore to our forefathers From the days of old." There is a restoration coming and the promise, the certainty of that is rooted in the fact that God swore something to Abraham and he is a God of unchanging love and he does what he promises. The Old Testament ratifies these promises even when Israel is in sin and being rebuked by her prophets.

What about the New Testament? After all, the Jews did kill him, you remember that, right? God didn't nullify his promises to Israel then either. This is our last point for this evening as time starts to run away from us. The New Testament ratification of the promises. Here's the thing, the argument by those who say it's conditional goes like,

"Well, they rejected the Messiah. They crucified him. They forfeited the blessings and now all of this goes to the church, not to the nation of Israel." That can't be right. After the crucifixion, after they had crucified Christ, Peter spoke to the Jews on the presuppositions that the covenant was still in effect.

Look at Acts 3 beginning in verse 19, "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you." He's talking to the Jews. "The Christ appointed for you whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time." There is a period of restoration that is still ahead, he says to them. "Moses said," verse 22, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like Me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." Verse 24, "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days." Look, he's making the same argument that I just did, the Old Testament has promised this restoration. The Old Testament ratified these promises. Samuel and the prophets during periods of intense disobedience, unspeakable betrayal of their covenant position before God, and yet here's Peter speaking to these Jews saying, "All the prophets have spoken about this." Verse 25, he says to them, "It is you," at the moment he spoke this, these unbelieving Jew who had crucified Christ, "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways." Here they are, the blood of Christ still fresh dripping off their hands, so to speak, and Peter says, "I'm preaching to you based on the promises that God made to Abraham that there is blessing for you. Simply repent and come to Christ because the promises of the covenant are still in effect."

Romans 9 to 11, those chapters 9 to 11 support this view. Let's look at just a couple of very quick verses. This is a totally inadequate way to deal with this material but what can I say? Romans 11:1, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." Verse 28, "From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice," speaking about the Jews who are still unbelieving. Have they been set aside forever then? The answer is no and the line of Abraham has not been set aside. Paul says, "they are beloved," why? "For the sake of the fathers." Because God made a promise to the patriarchal fathers that started with Abraham and God intends to keep that promise. Verse 29, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

So when a few months ago during our doctrinal series we talked about the future things that would take place, what comes next, and we talked about the millennium and things of that nature, that's all rooted in the fact that God made promises to Abraham that he still intends to keep; that there will be a time when the nation of Israel is shown to be under the favor of God. Now, quickly, that is not to say that the present political entity of Israel

represents God's people except in the fact that they are carrying on the physical line. They are still rejecting the Messiah. They are not under the favor of God because they are rejecting Christ now, but there is a believing remnant of Jews and for their sake God will keep the promise until he brings about a greater ingathering of this people, when he supernaturally brings about their repentance and they look upon the one that they pierced and they repent and nationally they receive the blessing that God had promised to them. He will give the land to the nation of Israel in a time still future when he supernaturally brings about their repentance at the end of the age and ushers in the millennial kingdom. That's how significant his promises to Abraham are. God is going to keep his promises to give them, which is rooted also in his promises to David, that's a whole other topic, but God made promises to give a nation to Abraham. He promised David that he would have a man on his throne who would reign over the earth. That hasn't happened yet. God is going to do it. For the Jews, disobedient generations might forfeit the blessing of these promises, but God will not abandon the Jews entirely and forever. Do you know why? Because he promised and God's promises are permanent. He keeps his promises.

And so we see that God made Abraham prominent, he made promises to Abraham that are permanent that he will carry out, and as we continue on our study here on Tuesday nights we'll see more about how that plays out. One last thing just in terms of making all of this personal, if God could revoke his promises to Israel, do you know what he could also do? He could revoke his promises to you. If he won't keep his promise to Israel, you have no assurance that he will keep his promise to you. But do you know what? He keeps his promises. He's going to keep his promise to Israel and when he said he will never leave us nor forsake us, do you know what he's going to do? He's going to keep it. He's going to keep us secure in Christ all the way to perfect bliss in heaven.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank you that you are a covenant keeping God, that you are a promise keeping God, and that what you promised to Abraham you intend to carry out. We don't know how all of this plays out in the world, we're not going to try to exegete today's headlines in this way, we simply believe your word and trust your word that when you say, "I will. I will. I will. I'll do this. I'll do this. I'll do this," Father, we're not going to accuse you, we're not going to teach that you set that promise aside. We will bow before your holy character. We will bow before your immutable purpose. We will bow before and be grateful for your unchanging love which you promised to Abraham and his descendants and, Father, which in Christ you have graciously granted us. And Lord, we would pray for those who are still outside the promises of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that to those who repent and come to Christ they would find the full forgiveness of their sins. Father, we would extend that promise once more to them, but just as you keep promises throughout thousands of years to a nation of people and intend to fulfill them in time yet to come, you promise the forgiveness of sins to those who would come to our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, may you stir in the hearts of someone tonight in this room or who hears this message in media later on, stir in their hearts, here is a promise keeping God. Jesus said, "The one who comes to me, I will never cast out." Lord, may that person, that sinner, come to Christ and throw themselves upon him for mercy and say, "Lord, receive

me too. Keep your promise to me. Lamb of God, I come for salvation from my sin." Lord, we praise you for your faithfulness and your mercy and your goodness and we commit all of these things to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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