

The Covenant of Grace: Abraham

I. Grace: Abraham receives an expanded promise

- The covenant to Abraham builds on the promise to Adam (Gen 3:15) that a suffering redeemer will defeat Satan.
- God freely makes promises to Abraham:
 - Special covenant relationship with God: God will establish an everlasting covenant with Abraham's descendants and be God to them (17:2, 7-8).
 - Abundant offspring: He will become a great, exceedingly numerous nation (12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:2; 18:18). He will even be "the father of a multitude of nations" (17:4-6).
 - God will protect him (12:3; 15:1). Though his seed will be slaves in another land, God will bring them out with many possessions (15:14)
 - Greatness: God will make his name great (12:2); Kings will come from Abraham (17:6).
 - Land: His seed will possess the land of promise (12:7; 13:14-15; 15:7, 18-21; 17:8)
 - Redemption for the whole world: He and his seed will be a blessing to all the families of the earth (12:2-3; 18:18). The redeemer will come through him (cf. Gal 3:16).
- God's kingdom plan: a holy people living with a holy God in a holy place (Thomas).

II. Grace: God promises to fulfill both sides of the covenant (Gen 15)

- The ritual of the animals cut in half (Gen 15:9-10) is a ritual of self-cursing; those who walk in between the pieces say, "may I be like these animals if I break the covenant" (Jer 34:18).
 - Sefire Treaty (8th c. BC): "[Just as] this calf is cut in two, so may Mati'el be cut in two, and may his nobles be cut in two" (COS 2:82, p. 214).
- But instead of Abraham passing through the pieces with God, in Gen 15:17 the fire pot and torch (representing God) pass through the pieces.
- Implication: God accepts responsibility to fulfill both sides of the covenant: divine and human.

III. Obedience in response to grace (Gen 17)

- Gen 15 is the first phase of the covenant-making ritual (God's commitment to Abraham). Gen 17 is the second phase (Abraham's commitment to God) (Block).
- Already, before God details the commands, he considers Abraham to be righteous by faith: Gen 15:6: "[Abraham] believed the LORD, and [the LORD] counted it to him as righteousness" (cf. Rom 4:9; Gal 3:6).
- God's requirements of Abraham:
 - To leave his father's house and his relatives to go to a new land (12:1)
 - To walk before God and be blameless (17:1)
 - To circumcise the males of his household (17:9-14)
 - To keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and justice (18:19).
 - These requirements are how they will inherit the blessing (18:19).
- Murray: "Without question the blessing of the covenant and the relation which the covenant entails cannot be enjoyed or maintained apart from the fulfillment

of certain conditions on the part of the beneficiaries ... Fellowship is always mutual and when mutuality ceases fellowship ceases.”

IV. The test of obedience (Gen 22)

- A new test like that of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22).
- Abraham’s passing the test is based on his confidence in God’s grace.
 - 22:8: “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”
 - 22:5: Abraham’s confidence in his son’s resurrection (“we will return”).
 - Heb 11:19: “[Abraham] considered that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”
- After Abraham passes the test with sacrificing Isaac, YHWH swears an oath: Gen 22:16–18.
 - Reiteration of seed promise, all nations blessed through them (22:17–18).
 - Clarifies that they will conquer their enemies (22:17; cf. 3:15).
 - The oath includes the rest of the covenant too (24:7).
 - Reason: Abraham obeyed (22:16; 26:5)
 - The oath shows that Abraham is God’s permanent choice as the father of the new human race. Heb 6:17: “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath...”
- This test of obedience points forward to Jesus.
 - As Gen 15 prophesied, God fulfills both sides of the covenant.
 - Jesus passes the ultimate test of obedience in going to the cross and offering himself for us. His obedience secures blessing and victory for all his descendants (us).