

Abrahamic Covenant

I. Themes and Structure of Genesis 11:27-50

A. Themes

- The most important theme is the God of blessing making a covenant with Abraham and his descendents. This covenant builds on the one with Noah in 9:1-17, but where it focused on universal benefits for all, this covenant is focused on the family of Abraham being blessed who will then bless the rest of the world.
- A second theme is the motifs of death and burial. Death is seen as slowing the fulfillment of the promises, thus reminding the reader of the presence of the curse. Thus the concern is for descendents in order to see the fulfillment of the promises.
- A third theme is that of good and evil in conflict. Where God is good in providing blessing of fertility and life there are the struggles and obstacles to overcome. Evil threatens to overcome the promises most commonly in the form of deception, and at other times through conflict between people. Thus the story of Genesis is the triumph of good over evil through the development of the covenantal promises.

B. Structure

The “accounts” (toledot) of Genesis 11:27-50:26

1. Terah/Abraham (11:27-25:11)
2. Ishmael (25:12-18)
3. Isaac (25:19-35:29)
4. Esau (36:1-8)
5. Esau the father of Edom (36:9-37:1)
6. Jacob (37:2-50:26)

II. God’s Covenant with Abraham

A. The Promise of Blessings (11:27-12:9)

1. Why did God choose to bless Abram?

2. What is lacking in the command of God to Abram in verse 1?

The promises that God gave to Abram can be divided into three categories.

1)

2)

3)

3. What in the texts lets you know whether Abram believed God or not?

4. In light of Genesis 4-11 what is God doing with Abram in verses 1-6?

The mention of Lot in close connection to Abram probably means that Abram viewed Lot as his heir (cf. 11:27-32; 12:4-5; 13:1-2).

The mention of Abram being seventy-five years old implies that Abram left Harran sixty years before his father died. This remark shows Abram putting the call of God above loyalty to his family.

5. What obstacles does Abram immediately face in verses 4-6?

6. What was the point of the Lord appearing to Abram in verse 7 if nothing new is mentioned?

7. How does Abram respond to God?

B. The Making of the Covenant (15:1-21)

1. Why is Abram distressed in verses 1-2 and what does this say about how he understood the promises of God to be fulfilled?

2. How does the Lord respond to Abram's distress in verses 4-5?

In verse 6 the Hebrew word for "believe" has the idea of

The Hebrew word for "righteousness" means

3. In verses 7-11 is Abram lacking in faith?

The "birds of prey" are seen as unclean (Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:12-18) and represent foreign nations (Ezek. 17:3, 7; Zech. 5:9), most likely Egypt. Genesis 22:16-18; 26:5 states that Abraham's faithful obedience to the covenant is what guaranteed the blessings for his descendents. Exod. 2:24 and Deut. 9:5 state that the exodus is grounded in the promises to the patriarchs.

4. What is the significance of what God tells Abram in verses 12-16?

C. The Sign of the Covenant (17:1-27)

In verse 1 to “walk before” any one is

1. Considering the previous event why would God in verses 1-2 give Abram the conditional promise of fulfilling His covenant based on Abrams obedience?
2. What does this say about the nature of the covenant to be conditional or unconditional?
3. How does Abram respond to wait God says to him?

God changes Abram’s name from Abram, “exalted father” to Abraham, “the father of a multitude.”

4. What is the significance of God’s statement in verse 9?

The nature of circumcision.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

God changes Sarai, “my princess” Sarah, “royal princess from whom kings would come.” Abraham’s name had emphasized the multitude of the seed where Sarah’s name emphasized the royal nature of the line.

5. In light of Abraham’s previous demonstrations of faith how should the reader interpret his laughter in verse 17?
6. How does Abraham respond to God’s command of circumcision?

See *The Meaning of the Name El Shaddai* Excursus

D. The Ratification of the Covenant (22:1-19)

1. Why would God require Abraham to sacrifice his son and what does this say about God?

The real point of the act was

2. What is it that God is truly asking Abraham to sacrifice in asking for his son?

The designation of “the land of Moriah” occurs again in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the mountain on which the temple stood in Jerusalem.

3. What kind of faith does Abraham demonstrate in verses 3-8?

4. What do you notice about Isaac’s actions in this story?

5. What is the significance of God’s statement in verse 12?

6. What does God do after He stops Abraham?

Verse 16 is where the Lord makes the covenant with Abraham unconditional. For God swears by Himself that because of what Abraham has done that day God will most certainly bless Abraham and his descendents. If it was already unconditional why did God make a big deal about swearing a promise that He was already going to unconditionally honor back in chapter 15? Likewise why does He base the fulfillment of the covenant on the events of chapter 22 if He was already going to unconditionally fulfill them back in chapter 15?

7. What added promise does God make to Abraham in verses 15-18?

III. The Promise of Land

A. The Patriarchs

- With Isaac and then Jacob, God will reiterate His promise with Abram and then promise the same to them because of the faith of Abraham making the covenant conditional. God will then call them to a life of walking with Him in obedience.
- Though both Isaac and Jacob will devote their lives to Yahweh the promises will be hindered through their own deception and disobedience and those that they encounter. Because of their faith and despite their shortcomings God will stay true to His promises and bless them with long life and fertility.
- Jacob has twelve sons who become the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel when Moses leads them out of Egypt. The last part of Genesis is the stories of the twelve sons and how they live in light of God's desire for obedience.
- Genesis ends with Jacob and his sons in Egypt and Jacob prophesying what kind of nation they will become when they emerge from Egypt to take the Promised Land (Gen. 49:1-28).

B. The Land

- God's blessing was manifested in a long and satisfying life in the land of promise, and His judgment was manifested in premature death or death in exile. Though Israel would always retain the promise of the land because of God's one-sided covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:8), God gave them an opportunity to choose between life and death, blessing and cursing on the basis of the Mosaic covenant.
- This is stated clearly in Deuteronomy 30:15-20. This passage, which has been called the clearest expression of the Israelite view of life, demonstrates that life in the land is contingent upon Israel's faithfulness to God's commands Israel would enjoy a prosperous physical life through obedience, but death and exile would result from disobedience (Robert A. Pyne. *Soteriology*, p. 30).

C. Death

- From an Israelite perspective, a natural death at the end of a long and satisfying life was not thought of as punishment, but as a great reward (Gen. 35:29; Ex. 20:12; Jud. 8:32; Ps. 21:4; 91:16). In contrast, an early death or death in exile represented God's punishment (Ps. 102:23; Is. 65:20; Deut. 28:58-68).
- In Genesis 46:30, Jacob said that he was ready to die after seeing Joseph alive. He was satisfied, and he regarded his life as complete. However, when he believed Joseph to be dead, he anticipated that his own death would be a bitter one as a result (Gen. 37:35).
- Similarly, Number 16 records several examples of premature death, which came through the judgment of God. In verses 29 and 30, Moses indicates that this was the only kind of death that would be interpreted as the judgment of God?
- The thought of a premature death was abhorrent to the righteous Israelite, who feared being cut off from his people and from the worship of His God (Ps. 88) (Robert A. Pyne. *Soteriology*, p. 30).

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