

Genesis in Biblical Perspective: The Gospel of Christ from Genesis – The Promises of a Promise Keeping God

Genesis 17

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

This is the truth. Genesis 17:1-8 says

[1] When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, [2] that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." [3] Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, [4] "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. [5] No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. [6] I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [7] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

The grass withers, the flower fades, and this is the Word of our God. It abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

Israeli Prime Minister Sharon has recently been ill and had a stroke. Uneasiness has come over the nation and other nations, with one more piece of instability in a very unstable area. Not long after the stroke a televangelist, Mr. Pat Robertson, came on the television and has since apologized for this but subsequently it begs for us to understand it, said that it was his understanding that incident was in fact God's chastisement and judgment because under Sharon's leadership Israel had given away the land of promise to the Palestinians in Palestine, therefore judgment had now come because that was holy land set apart for the nation of Israel. He said that nation should have kept control of it and by giving it away even in the cause of peace, therefore judgment was rendered. Later on Robertson apologized for the inappropriateness of the timing but what about that view?

We are in a passage, Genesis 17, in which that view is rooted. There is a land, Canaan and it belongs to a nation, Israel. Gird up the loins of truth around your mind. I want to park in Genesis 17 for a couple of studies for a couple of reasons. Number one is this whole issue of the land which is right here in Genesis 17. How does the New Testament interpret this promise of the land? The Bible says you are the seed of Abraham. It is promised right here. What does the New Testament mean when it says you are the seed of Abraham? The New Testament goes on to talk about the seed of Abraham not ultimately and finally being the Isaac but Jesus. How does Genesis 17 come to fulfillment and fruition in the New Testament? Is the fact that the fulfillment of Genesis 17 a geographical political entity called the present nation of Israel or is Israel understood differently in the New Testament or what does it mean to be a child of Abraham? What is the New Testament understanding of Israel and how does that relate to a present day national Israel? All of that is in seed form in Genesis 17 and must be worked through in the Scriptures and instead of just floundering through I want to go through this more thoroughly.

In this study we'll just draw some larger perspectives from Genesis 17. Think of it this way. There is a tree in the forest of redemption called the Abrahamic covenant which we find reaffirmed in Genesis 17. The Abrahamic covenant is unfolded in Genesis 12, 15, and 17. In Genesis 12 He calls Abraham out and says "I'll make a covenant with you and give you a land." In Genesis 15 He says "I'm going to give you a land, a seed, and that seed I'll grant to you will be a multitude." Then in Genesis 17 He comes back and says "There's a seed, there's a land, there's a multitude and more than that nations are going to come from you. More than that, kings will come from you." Who are these kings that come from the seed of Abraham? What is this nation? What is the land and what are the implications of all of this?

This is something we need to look at further. We have this tree that exists in this forest and sometimes we don't understand the tree because we don't see the forest. I want us to see the forest and then in another study we'll look at the tree itself, the Abrahamic covenant, the land, sea, kings, multitudes, etc. I love this chapter because of the naming stuff that goes on where God names Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. Sarai meant queen or princess of many and Sarah means queen or princess of a multitude of royalty. Abram meant father of many. Can you imagine the jokes running around in the tents? He didn't have any and the one he had was through a surrogate mother.

That reminds me of the time I went to Jamaica Bible College to preach and the two pastors that picked me were named Pastor Loud and Pastor Humble. Within one week I realized that Pastor Loud was humble and Pastor Humble was loud and not humble. Anyway you have the picture. So here is Abram meaning father of many and now he gets changed to Abraham which means the father of a multitude. Now he is not just a nation but he is many nations. Kings are going to

come from him. Isn't he glad another name showed up in this text? He says "I am the Lord, Adonai, Yahweh" and He gives him another name in Genesis 17:1 which says "*I am God Almighty (El Shaddai).*" I am the God from the power that reigns on High and I am more than that for I am the God of all power. In other words, whenever you see power in this world it has been delegated from the living God because He is the God of all power. I am Almighty. Now I give you a name, Abraham and I give your wife a name, Sarah. I'm telling you that if you walk before Me and be blameless then here's what I will do.

When we come to that we see that running through this entire chapter this word covenant just keeps coming up. In Genesis 17 you'll find the word covenant showing up ten times. As we go through a chapter like this I'm not sure we understand what this means and how it relates to Hebrews 13, the eternal covenant where God has made the Father with His Son, ratified by the blood of His Son. I'm not sure we understand how all this fits together. In fact I know many of us just go through this and just don't see this connection so in this study

I want to connect a few dots. What we are about to go over is the key to understanding your Bible as a whole. It is the key to understanding the singular message of the Bible as a whole over 2500 years with 40 plus authors that God has unfolded, yet there is a unified message. That message that keeps unfolding is that God for His glory and our joy in Him has established a covenant grace that is progressively unfolding in the Scriptures as God accomplishes redemption that we might live forever, be forgiven of our sins and there is one consistent message that is right there in the Scriptures that we need to see.

It's not a collection of Bible stories where you are to be like David or be like this one but it's a message that God saves sinners through His covenant of grace. It's unfolded with consistency throughout the Scriptures. So I need to understand the Scriptures. I need to understand Genesis 17 to understand the signs of the covenant, the sacraments, and my salvation. So I want to give you three very simple thoughts in this study.

Number one, is this Bible is a book of Divine covenants. Note the plural. It is a book of Divine (meaning God given) covenants, plural. What are the two covenants in your Bible? Number one there is the covenant of creation because it was in creation that it was given and we also call it the covenant of works because there was no sin or grace involved here. It was a covenant of works that God made with Adam on behalf of all of his posterity. A covenant has requirements. What did God give as the requirements in the covenant with Adam, in the covenant of creation or the covenant of works?

I will refer you to the passages and you can read them on your own. These requirements are found in Genesis 1 and 2. In the covenant of creation or covenant of works God says to Adam "I want you to do three things. The three

things you are supposed to do is one be fruitful and multiply. Number two subdue the earth. You are My caretaker over My creation that is here for My glory. Number three rule over the creatures and the creation.” Adam was not something that crawled up through a system of mutations out of a gas heap but he was made in the image of God to rule over God’s creation, to bear witness over it and to maintain it all for His glory. Then, in Genesis 2, God added a fourth requirement that was negative. That was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Then God gave two covenant, visible signs built around His promises. One was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Don’t go to that tree but come to Me and believe My Word. The second was the tree of Life. Then He made two promises in this covenant. Promise number one, was with obedience I will let you eat of the tree of Life. So with obedience I promise you and all of your posterity life but if you disobey Me then comes death to Adam and all of his seed. We know Adam did take the fruit and eat. We know that in Adam we all died. We are born spiritually dead, facing physical death, facing eternal death. The wages of sin is death and all who belong to Adam are born with that original sin, having been given to us in our sin nature. Then we are born as sinners in rebellion against God but God in His mercy did not stop there.

Once sin entered in then God revealed from His eternal purposes another covenant. This is a covenant of grace with a second Adam. Now He cannot find a mediator from the first Adam because all that are born of Adam are sinners. So there will have to be a new Adam, a second Adam. God says “I now make a covenant with a second Adam and I will give Him life and victory over all of sin as He wins the victory and it will be granted as an inheritance to all who belong to Him in that covenant.” There are multiple passages that I could show you on this but I’m just going to show you one.

Let’s look at I Corinthians 15 which is a great passage on Jesus Christ, His victory over sin, and how the resurrection proclaims that victory. I Corinthians 15:20-26 says

[20] But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [21] For as by a man (Adam) came death, by a man (Jesus Christ) has come also the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. [23] But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. [24] Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. [25] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

So what we have here is a Bible. In Genesis 1 through 3 is the covenant of works. Adam dies and all of Adam's seed are born sinners, dead in their sins because of his sin as he is our head. God does not leave it in that situation but God now gives another covenant, a covenant of grace. He produces a second Adam but it can't come from the seed of Adam because that seed is all sinners. He will bring a new Adam and this Adam will fulfill My law and win the victory on behalf of His Seed. That's why Jesus when He wins the victory says "Father, all whom You have given Me I lose not one but will raise them up on the last day." As Adam failed and sinned permeated us all, Christ has won the victory and therefore all who are in Christ have the victory because of His work, not our work. His work has been given to us as a gift of grace in the Lord Jesus.

Now, this covenant of grace does not just jump out in the Bible. The covenant of grace is like a baby, a child, a person. When that baby is born and you're holding it in your hands, everything that, that baby is, is already there. All of its DNA is in place and all it's going to do is just get bigger and bigger and bigger as it grows and grows and grows, but everything it's going to be is right there. So what does God do? God gives the covenant of grace but it doesn't come full blown mature. He gives it in an infant stages and it begins to grow step by step. He progressively brings forth His work of redemption and reveals it progressively in the Scriptures.

So the second thing to remember is that the covenant of grace that begins in Genesis 3 and runs all the way through Revelation 22, is progressively revealed through a series of covenants that are in the Word of God. God comes back to Adam and says "Adam, you are cursed because of your sin but I'm going to give the woman a Seed and that Seed will win the victory over the serpent. The Seed of the woman will be bruised on his heel. It will cost Him but He'll bruise the head of the serpent and win the victory." Immediately God is saying I have a supernatural work because women don't have seed, but men do yet there will be a woman who has a Seed. That is a supernatural promise. That Seed will win the victory over Satan, sin, death, hell and the grave. Then God unfolds it a little bit more with the covenant with Noah. So we

see God's patience with all of humanity as He is accomplishing His purposes. He'll never destroy the world again until the last day when the judgment of fire will come. Then the covenant unfolds to where we are with Abraham. It won't stop there. It unfolds with Abraham and it will go to Moses four hundred plus years later. Then from Moses it will built upon with David. Then with David it will be built upon as God brings His people back from Babylonian captivity and with the prophets restores them back to the land, the land of Palestine. He restores the worship of God. He restores the city, the prophets and the priests and kings restore themselves back into ministry. That is the stair steps of the covenant of grace. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets is what we call the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, but it's not disconnected from the New

Testament. On the contrary it is the New Testament maturing. St. Augustine said it this way; "The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed." God's work of saving His people by grace and how it is accomplished is unfolding in your Bible step by step by step. So that Old Covenant or that six stair steps leads to the New Covenant which is God's statement of the fulfillment of His promises to win a people to Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

Who is the Mediator of this covenant? It is Christ Himself. I'd like to look at I Timothy 2. Here the Apostle Paul is telling us to pray for all kinds of men because it is all kinds of men that the Lord is saving. This is how he emphasizes it. I Timothy 2:3-6 says

[3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

Adam couldn't do it. Noah couldn't do it. Abraham couldn't do it. Moses couldn't do it. David couldn't do it. The prophets couldn't do it. On the contrary they are all sinners like you and me. They can't save me. They can't be my mediator. They can't take my sin. They can't provide for me a perfect righteousness. They are sinners like me, but they are all pointing to Christ. Then when Christ comes there is One Mediator between God and man. It is the Man, Christ Jesus, the Son of God, having come in the flesh. There is our One Mediator of the New Covenant.

Here is the third thought in light of that. A covenant always has signs and seals. There is a sign to initiate it and a sign to maintain it. In the Old Covenant the sign to initiate people into God's covenant community was circumcision. The sign to revive them and encourage them was the sign of table fellowship called the Passover. The interesting thing in Genesis 17 and in the book of Exodus when the Passover is given under Moses, it is said to be an everlasting sign. Circumcision is an everlasting sign but we don't do it anymore. The book of Exodus says the Passover is an everlasting sign but we don't do it anymore. Why not? It is because circumcision and the Passover are everlastingly fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christ has fulfilled those two signs just like He has fulfilled all of the promises, prophecies, types and shadows in the Old Testament. All of what God has promised is yes and amen in Christ. Christ is our circumcision. Christ is our Passover. Bear with me and let me show you that.

There are three books in your Bible that are there to teach you this. They are the books of Colossians, Galatians and Hebrews. They show you how to deal with the Old Testament in general and these issues of circumcision and the Passover in particular. I just want to show you two passages. First of all I'd like to look at

Colossians 2. This is a great passage on who Christ is and what it means to be saved because you trust in Jesus Christ but notice how our salvation is described in Colossians 2.

Colossians 2:11-14 says

[11] In him (Jesus) also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, [12] having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. [13] And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

If you were put in a Roman prison for a capital crime in that day up over the prison gate was your crime. When they took you out to kill you they took the crime and they fastened it to your body and took you out. What is Paul giving you a picture of? When Jesus went to the cross He took our debt, our crimes upon Himself, cut them away from us and paid for them. Christ is our circumcision. He cuts out our old heart by the Spirit and gives us a new heart. We are a new creation. He cuts away your sin record and nails it to the cross. Oh this glorious thought; my sin, not the part but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord Oh my soul! There is the everlasting circumcision in Christ.

What about the Passover? Let's look at I Corinthians 5. Again, the best study is in Hebrews but I want to show you this one. I Corinthians 5:6-7 says *[6] Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? [7] Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.* The Passover is everlasting in Christ who is our Passover Lamb. What was the Passover lamb for? The Passover lamb was sacrificed so that the first born wouldn't be taken. What does God do? It is His first born that goes to the cross and pays for our sin. The blood that is now on us is on Jesus and God passes over because the judgment has fallen on Him. So here are these two Old Covenant signs fulfilled in Christ.

So what has He given us in the New Testament? He has given us two New Testament signs. Those bloody signs of circumcision and the Passover are fulfilled in Jesus and now we have two bloodless signs – baptism which replaces circumcision and the Lord's Supper which replaces the Passover. At the Lord's Table we're refreshed in the Lord. I want to give you a couple of thoughts in conclusion.

The first thing is this. In light of what we have been studying about the covenants we will come back in detail to the Abrahamic covenant. Your Bible is not a collection of various things that God did at various moments but it is the unfolding of the covenant of grace. It is a book of Divine covenants. In Adam we die and in Christ we are made alive for all of those who are in Christ. The covenant of grace is unfolding step by step by step. The church is not a parenthesis or plan b but it's the absolute fulfillment of what God promised in the Abrahamic covenant. In you Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed. There is a unified statement in your Bible of the unfolding of the work of grace in Jesus Christ systematically through the Scriptures. The Word of God is the inspired, inerrant record of God's glory and the salvation of His people by grace through Christ the Mediator. Every time you go into your Bible that is what you ought to see. Christ is that wave offering. Christ is that burnt offering, that sacrifice, that feast, the Prophet, the Priest, the Ark, and that glorious coat that covers me with the favor of my Father. It's all Christ from the beginning to the end when He delivers it all up to the Father. I want you to be there in Him, delivered up.

The second thing is the sacraments and the signs of the covenant. Remember everything in a preceding covenant is in place unless the subsequent alters it or abrogates it. That's why there was this big discussion after the resurrection of Jesus. They go around, preach the Gospel and people are becoming Christians and they're ready to get baptized. The discussion they had was you can come to Jesus to be saved and baptized but first you have to come to Moses and be circumcised. They said no. Every time the covenant unfolds you don't need to repeat everything but the subsequent covenant has altered it and abrogated it. So what's the right use of the law or the right understanding of the prophets, priests, circumcision, and the Passover?

Come to the New Testament, look back at our foundation and shine the Light back on all and understand what God has done. That's why we believe today that there is nothing in the New Testament where God has pulled the family out. On the contrary He has reaffirmed it, the promise of you and your children. He has reaffirmed it by telling us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household. Our children are born sinners but we have a covenant promise just like they did in the Old Covenant but it's a better covenant. We have not done away with it but we do have a new sign. Baptism has replaced circumcision. So here are the signs and seals of the covenant.

Now here is this glorious blessing that has come in Jesus Christ who is the final installment and that's the third thing I want you to see. What about salvation? The New Covenant is the final installment of God's covenant of grace until Jesus returns and brings it all to consummation. The covenant of grace is a glorious covenant because in this covenant there is One who has come before the God of the covenant, sent by God as a covenant Keeper. It is Jesus Christ. What did

God tell Abraham to do? He said in Genesis 17, "Walk before Me and be blameless." Is Abraham blameless? He lied about his wife twice. He didn't believe God's promises and had a surrogate mother for his first child. He isn't blameless. Noah wasn't blameless either. He was a man who was caught up in incest because of his drunkenness. Will David be blameless? Will the prophets be blameless? No, none of them will be blameless.

But, God will send One. It is His Son Jesus Christ. God Almighty will come in the flesh and what is impossible with God will become sure and forever in Jesus Christ. He is the One that comes into the covenant, walks before His Father and is blameless. The Father says "This is My Son in whom I am well pleased." I hope and pray that you are in Him and He is your Redeemer, Savior, and you rest in Him. I can tell you in this covenant there are no cursings. He will discipline you because He loves you but there are no cursings. That is why because of this Christ, in this covenant, all who belong to Him that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The Almighty has made sure of that, God Almighty. I want you to be in Him. I plead with you to be in Him. If you're in Him know that you are forgiven.

Will you want to walk before Him and be blameless? Yes. We'll call that faithfulness. You won't be sinless. We will call that wanting to sin less but we won't call it sinless but you do have a sinless Mediator and His righteousness has been given to you. It is the blamelessness of Jesus. There is your redemption. I want to take this out of this whole covenant dynamic and bring it down to people because I want it to be in your heart and life. I will tell you a person who astounded me when I met her.

We had a ministry of mercy to single parents when I was in Charlotte, North Carolina called Christ our Shepherd. We opened up the facility for Joni Erickson Tada to come in and bring her ministry as well. Because of that she would come and speak to us at Christ Covenant and we'd get the opportunity to hear her sing and see her paintings. Joni at a young age dove into a lake, broke her neck and because of that became a quadriplegic. After that she came to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. People came to her and said "If you believe in Jesus He'll heal you." She said "I'll believe in Jesus and I know He can heal me but He may not want to." She found out He didn't want to heal her. He had something bigger for her, something better. It was the Almighty in her weakness and His redemption. She showed that to me one time and I'll never forget it.

We brought in hundreds of disabled children that we were ministering to that she came and spoke to. She sat in front of them and she ate. She did this by having some movement in her arms. One day she clumsily knocked over the silverware. Her wheel chair rolled over the silverware. They picked up the spoon that had been bent into the shape of an L. They were getting ready to throw away that spoon that had been bent and she said "Wait." They put the bent spoon in her

arm brace and she could feed herself with that bent spoon. She can't feed herself with a straight spoon but with the bent spoon she can just shovel it and eat. She told all of those kids that story and told them that God bent the spoon for me and that's what God has done for all of you kids. That's what He did for me. He got me bent and broken where He could use me.

With her mouth she has now become a renowned artist. With the lips she can move hundreds of songs thrill our souls when she sings them. With her voice she dictates book after book after book that encourages us. Her radio ministry lifts us up. That's why she said about the movie that was made about her life that if she could go back and undo that day when my neck was broken I would not do it. The Almighty put me where He would use me.

Come to the Almighty. Don't come in your strengths but come in your weaknesses. Forgive me for I'm a sinner. I'm broken. Use me. The Almighty will save you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the opportunity just to begin to peel back some of the glories and majesties of this wonderful covenant of grace whereby we're saved through Jesus Christ, the One Mediator between God and man, Your Son, our Savior. Lord, what we could not do You have done. What Abraham, Noah and David could not do Your Son has done. O how we rejoice in Him! If this day you have never made that commitment to Jesus Christ, there is not another Mediator and not another covenant, but there is a glorious offer of salvation by grace. If you will bend, break and trust the Almighty in the work that His Son has done on the cross for you then come today. Please contact us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and we'll be happy to pray with you. Put your trust in Christ for He will save you and there is no condemnation for those in Him. Father, I thank You and I praise You in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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