

God's Eternal Faithfulness
Part 1: The Abrahamic Covenant
Genesis 12:1-3

I. Introduction

A. One of the greatest encouragements found in the Scriptures is the doctrine of the **faithfulness** of God.

Lamentations 3:22-23 – The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; **great is your faithfulness.**

1 Corinthians 1:9 – God is faithful; by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Psalms 36:5 – Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, **your faithfulness to the clouds.**

“This faithfulness of God is of the utmost practical significance to the people of God. It is the ground of their confidence, the foundation of their hope, and the cause of their rejoicing. It gives them courage to carry on in spite of their failures, and fills their hearts with joyful anticipations. . .” (Louis Berkhof)

“**In all His relations with His people God is faithful.** He may be safely relied upon. No one ever yet really trusted Him in vain. We find this precious truth expressed almost everywhere in the Scriptures, for His people need to know that faithfulness is an essential part of the Divine character. This is the basis of our confidence in Him. . . This quality is essential to His being, without it He would not be God.” (A.W. Pink)

Exodus 34:6 – The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

Deuteronomy 7:9 – Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

Psalms 119:90 – **Your faithfulness endures to all generations;** you have established the earth, and it stands fast.

Psalms 89:1 – I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known **your faithfulness to all generations.**

Hebrews 10:23 – Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

“[Promises] About God’s infinite mercy and compassion –
about His readiness to forgive all who repent and believe —
about His willingness to forgive, pardon, and absolve the chief of sinners –
about His power to change hearts and alter our corrupt nature –
about the encouragements to pray, and hear the gospel, and draw near to the throne of grace –
about strength for duty, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexity, help in sickness,
consolation in death, support under bereavement, happiness beyond the grave, reward in glory —
about all these things there is an abundant supply of promises in the Word. . .
If anyone doubts it, I can only say, ‘Come, and see.’” (J.C. Ryle)

2 Corinthians 1:20 - For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

Definition

God's faithfulness can be defined as His **unchanging devotion** to do what He has said and fulfill **all** of the promises He has made to his people.

"God being who He is, cannot cease to be what He is, and being what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself. **He is at once faithful and immutable**, so all his words and acts must be and remain faithful." (A.W. Tozer)

B. One of the glorious concepts found in the Bible is the concept of a **covenant**.

"A compact or agreement between two parties binding them mutually to undertakings on each other's behalf." (G.L. Archer, "Covenant," Evangelical Dictionary of Theology)

"In Old Testament times a covenant was an agreement between two parties that bound them together with common interests and responsibilities. Generally, these covenants were bilateral agreements where both parties were responsible for the fulfilling of the covenant. . . In contrast, an unconditional, or unilateral covenant involved two parties, but the fulfillment of the covenant rested on only one party. . . Covenants were made between individuals [and] . . . between nations. . . Covenants were serious and sacred matters, and the reputation of the covenant maker was at stake." (Paul Benware, Understanding End Times Prophecy)

Genesis 21:27 – So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant.

Genesis 21:32 – So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines.

Genesis 31:44 – Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me.

2 Samuel 5:3 – So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel.

Terminology:

- Hebrew – *berit*. "Used to refer to international treaties (Josh. 9:6); clan alliances (Gen. 14:13), personal agreements (Gen. 31:44), legal contracts (Jer. 34:8-10), and loyalty agreements (1 Sam 20:14-17) including marriage agreements (Mal 2:14). (Cf. John H. Walton, *Covenant*, p.14).
- Greek – *diatheke* – "had the idea of will or testament, more of a legal word. . . not the usual term for a treaty or agreement." (Dr. Larry Pettegrew, Theology IV notes)

"In Old Testament usage, a [*berith*] means a league of friendship, either between man and man or between God and man, solemnly inaugurated, either by words alone or by words and symbolic ceremonies, in which obligations are undertaken on one or both sides. These obligations are often accompanied by an oath, and have the character of solemn promises." (Roger T. Beckwith, "The Unity and Diversity of God's Covenants," *Tyndale Bulletin* 38)

Malachi 2:14 – But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

II. Types of Covenants

Distinguished by Conditionality

- **Conditional Covenants** – (Bi-lateral covenants)

Exodus 19:5-6 – Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all the nations, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

- **Unconditional Covenants** – (Unilateral covenants)

Jeremiah 31:31-34 – “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Distinguished by Rank

- **Covenants between Equals** – two equal parties.

1 Samuel 18:3 – Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

Genesis 31:43-44 – Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne? Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me.

- **Covenants obligating a subordinate to a superior** – (Vassal covenants, or Obligation covenants)

1 Samuel 11:1-2 – Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.” But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, “On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.

- **Covenants obligating a superior to a subordinate** – (Grant Covenant, or Promise Covenant)

The master obligates himself to the servant.

The covenant serves mainly to protect the rights of the servant.

Curses are directed against the master if he were to fail.

III. The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12, 15, 17)

Genesis 12:1-3 – Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Genesis 1-11	Genesis 12-50
Four Events: Creation, Fall, Flood, Nations	Four People: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph
2000 years	200 years
How the world was cursed	How the world will be blessed

The Cursing of the World:

Genesis 3:14 - “Because you have done this, **cursed** are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

Genesis 3:17 - **cursed** is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

Genesis 4:11 - And now you are **cursed** from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

Genesis 9:25 - “**Cursed** be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”

The Blessing through Abraham:

Genesis 12:1-3 – Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**

Repeated in the Book of Genesis:

Genesis 15:1-6 – After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

v.7-10 – And he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” But he said, “O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” And he brought him all three, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.

“In those times, people entered into a binding covenant by slaughtering animals and dividing them in two pieces. The pieces were laid opposite one another, and those making the covenantal agreement walked between the pieces, thus solemnly ratifying the covenant by blood.” (Paul Benware)

v.11-21 – And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

"It means that God swore fidelity to His promises and placed the obligation of their fulfillment on Himself alone. Abraham made no such oath; he was in a deep sleep, yet aware of what God promised." (Charles Ryrie)

"Clearly the Abrahamic Covenant was not conditioned on anything Abraham would or would not do; its fulfillment in all its parts depends only on God's doings." (Ryrie)

"The promises were unconditional promises, that is, dependent ultimately on God's sovereign determination, as the striking ratification of the covenant indicated (Gen. 15:7-21). . . **God symbolically walked between the pieces, and Abraham was not invited to follow.** . . [God Himself undertook] to fulfill the conditions Himself, thus guaranteeing by the divine fidelity to His Word and by His power the accomplishment of the covenantal promises." (S. Lewis Johnson)

Genesis 17:1-8 – 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, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be called Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 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. 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."

v.15-18 – And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

v.19 – God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him."

v.21 – But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

The Nature of the Covenant

- Conditional or Unconditional?

Genesis 12:1-3 – Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And **I will** make of you a great nation, and **I will** bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **I will** bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you **I will** curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

The Provisions of the Covenant

1) The **Land**

Genesis 12:1 – The LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to **the land** that I will show you.

v.6-7 – At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give **this land.**”

Genesis 13:14-17 – The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, to **the land** that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”

15:18 – On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give **this land**, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

17:8 – 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.

Genesis 26:2-4 – And the LORD appeared to him [Isaac] and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in **this land**, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands.

Genesis 28:13-15 – And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. **The land** on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 35:11 – And God said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. **The land** that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give you the land to your offspring after you.”

2) The Seed

Genesis 12:2 – And I will make of you **a great nation**, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Genesis 15:5 – “Look forward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “**So shall your offspring be.**”

Genesis 17:4-5 – “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 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.**

v.6- I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and **I will make you into nations**, and kings shall come from you.

Genesis 26:4 – **I will multiply your offspring** as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

Genesis 46:2 – And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down into Egypt, for there I will make you into **a great nation.**”

3) The Blessing

Genesis 12:2 – I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

v.3 – I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse,

v.3 – and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

- The entire world was **cursed** in Adam.
- All the families of the earth will be **blessed** through Abraham.

Genesis 22:18 – in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be **blessed.** . .

Genesis 26:4 – in your offspring all the families of the earth shall be **blessed,**

Genesis 28:14 – in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be **blessed.**

The Fulfillment of the Covenant

Genesis 49:10 - The scepter shall not depart from **Judah**, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Matthew 1:1-2 - The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of **Abraham**. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of **Judah** and his brothers,

Matthew 1:17 - So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

The Fulfillment of the Covenant (continued):

Matthew 28:19-20 - Go therefore and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Galatians 3:13-14 - Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus **the blessing of Abraham** might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:29 - And if you are Christ's, then **you are Abraham's offspring**, heirs according to promise.

Romans 11:11 - So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.