

Covenant relationship oath-on-offer

• One covenant spread over chapters 15-22

• An oath is a promise that can never be lost

God's covenant with Abram continued

6. The burden of fulfilling the covenant is God's

7. Predictive prophecy

• All the mighty plans of God are revealed before they happen

• Also with individuals

Covenant-relationship is oath-on-offer. When God is in covenant with someone or with a group of people, it means that He is making or is about to make an oath. Every Christian is in covenant-relationship with God through the blood of Jesus. God is offering to make an oath to every Christian. He is willing to say to every Christian 'Now I know that you fear me; I will indeed bless you'.

In Genesis 15–22 one covenant is spread over a number of chapters. The promise first came in Genesis 12. There is no totally **new** promise in Genesis 15. Genesis 15 is the start of a covenant, but there is no covenant sign and no verbal oath. The covenant-sign comes in Genesis 17; the covenant oath is finally given (after Abram has reached a high level of obedience) in Genesis 22. No oath-language is found in anything said to Abram before Genesis 22:16–17.

God was offering to give Abram an oath. He was getting ready to say 'I swear by myself ... I will surely bless you'. When God gives an oath He 'makes up His mind' to do that which He has been promising. The promise can never be lost once God has given an oath.

This subject can be studied in connection with God's oath to Noah,¹ or in connection with God's oath to David.² Further aspects of covenant-and-oath can be seen in Genesis 15:12–21. We have seen (1) the covenant began with a reminder; (2) the covenant has a promise in it; (3) covenant is designed to motivate; (4) the covenant begins with blood- sacrifice; (5) the one receiving the promises has to protect the blood-sacrifice. We continue.

6. The burden of fulfilling the covenant is God's. God puts Abram into a deep sleep. It reminds us of Genesis 2:21. God put Adam to sleep before giving him Eve. It was a way of making it clear that Eve came to Adam without Adam's efforts, and wholly by God's working. Adam was not a participant in creating Eve. The story in Genesis 15:12 is similar. It lets us know that the promise is entirely God's and it is His responsibility to bring it to pass. It is far from being Abram's plan. He is asleep when God announces it to him! Abram only has to follow God's lead. The burden of fulfilling the covenant will be the Lord's. The 'thick and dreadful darkness' is a theophany, a representation of the presence of God comparable to that in Exodus 14:20, Deuteronomy 4:11, 5:22, 23, 1 Kings 8:12 and 2 Chronicles 6:1.

7. The covenant has predictive prophecy in it. In Genesis 15:13–16, Abram is given a predictive outline of Israel's future history. When God is about to act He generally gives some kind of preview of what is about to happen. Prophets are often fore-tellers. God does nothing without revealing His plan to prophets ^{□1}. Deuteronomy 18:9–10 warned that Canaanites have their demon-possessed men who seek to predict the future by the powers of evil spirits. Over and against such people God gives a prophet who accurately predicts what God will do ^{□2}. Men like Elisha often knew the future ^{□3}. Ezekiel knew Jerusalem well without ever going there ^{□4}. The prophets sometimes even knew the precise names of men who would be involved in God's kingdom centuries before those men appeared ^{□5}. Moses went to the king of Egypt knowing in advance what would happen ^{□6}. Jesus' coming as a Jew, from the tribe of Judah, in the line of David, born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem was all predicted before it happened. And every Christian knows in advance that Jesus will come in glory and majesty and every eye will see Him. All the mighty plans of God are revealed before they happen.

Even with individuals, we can expect to have a preview of how God is going to use us. At his conversion Saul of Tarsus knew what his work would be and who he would preach to ^{□1}; and he knew what would happen in the next few days as well ^{□2}! I myself, as a teenager preparing myself to be a scientist, was gripped with the conviction that I would spend my life preaching instead! A few years later I had a strong feeling that the location of my work would be Kenya. It took Paul ten years to get to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2–3 was ten years after his conversion). I was brought by God to Kenya 13 years after my conviction that I would fulfil my calling there – and in a most unexpected manner. And a year before I went there.

^{□1} see Amos 3:7
^{□2} Deuteronomy 18:22
^{□3} 2 Kings 6:12
^{□4} Ezekiel chapters 8–11
^{□5} 1 Kings 13:2; Isaiah 44:28; see also Acts 9:12
^{□6} Exodus 3:19–25

^{□1} Acts 22:2 1
^{□2} Acts 22:17–18

when passing one day through Nairobi, God gave me a powerful revelation that I would live near Argwings Khodek road. The anticipation was fulfilled. One year later I came to Nairobi; without any manipulation on my part. I lived near Argwings Khodek road. Eventually I moved away from that precise location, but I still drive up and down it almost every day. I was shown the very road a year before I moved to Nairobi!

• *God's ways of doing things*

Predictions large and small are built into God's ways of doing things. Abram is told that his descendants would go to a foreign country ^{☞1} and would be enslaved there ^{☞2}. Years later, through Joseph, it happened. Abram was told that they would be delivered from bondage ^{☞3}. Centuries later it happened; Israel was rescued from Egypt. Abram was told about his own personal future ^{☞4}. The approximate timing of the events was given to him ^{☞5}.

☞1 15:13
☞2 15:13
☞3 15:14
☞4 15:15
☞5 15:16

8. God offers an oath if Abram will persistently believe

8. God offers an oath if Abram will persistently believe. In Genesis 15:17, God (represented by a flame blazing in a fire- pot) passes through the pieces of sacrificed animals. Although it is difficult to interpret, it is almost certainly God's way of representing an oath. He is speaking in visual symbolic form of the fact that one day He will take an oath. There is no oath yet; it comes in 22:16–17. But God represents what He will do. The passing between the animals is an ancient covenant- ceremony. It is God's way of saying 'May I be cut to pieces like these animals if I do not keep my promise'. It is similar to the ceremony mentioned in Jeremiah 34:18. God is offering Abram an oath. It has not come yet, but it is being offered.

9. Promise expanded

9. The promise gets expanded. Genesis 15:18–21 is roughly the same as the promises that have been given before, but God gives greater detail. It is still a promise, not an oath.

10. Abram's seed - the beneficiaries

10. The beneficiaries are Abram's seed ^{☞1}. All who may be called 'Abram's seed' will get the fulfilment of the promise – once the oath of Genesis 22:16–17 is finally given.

☞1 15:18
☞1 22:1–18
☞2 Genesis 17:1–27

We shall see the outworking of this matter in the remaining stories of Abram's life. The full consummation and the giving of the oath will come when Abram has reached a certain level of obedience ^{☞1}. Soon ^{☞2} we shall be introduced to the covenant sign, circumcision.



• *The new covenant is parallel at every point*

The new covenant is parallel at every point. (i) The covenant has a promise. The promise is the blessings of the Holy Spirit. (ii) Every Christian is in a relationship where God is offering to take an oath about His promised blessings. In Hebrews it is called 'entering into rest'. (iii) The beneficiaries are believers and their seed on condition that they are saved ^{☞1}. (iv) The blood of the covenant is the blood of Jesus Christ. (v) When God swears to us, the promise concerned will not thereafter be lost. (vi) It takes time to enter rest. (vii) The covenant-signs are baptism and the Lord's Supper. (viii) It takes effect by our depending on the blood of Jesus Christ.

☞1 Acts 2:39

Footnotes

1 See my Genesis 1–11 (Sovereign World, 1996) chapters 7, 30, 32.
2 See my 2 Samuel (Sovereign World, 1996), chapters 12–13, and the story of David after 2 Samuel 7. See also my Theology of Encouragement (Paternoster, 1995), pp.62–66, 176.

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