

# The Abrahamic Covenant:

## The Terms of Our Relationship with God

# Introduction

- How should we think of the relationship between God and humans?
- What sort of models are typically used by Christians?
- A soft grandfather—whose ultimate job is to forgive us
- A great creator—who is not personally involved in our lives (Deism)
- A needy god—who engages in commercial exchanges with us
- <sup>24</sup> “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. <sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:24-25)

# Introduction

- The true God does not need us. Rather, we are dependent upon him
- So, how do we have a relationship with the God of the Bible?
- There is only one way—by his sovereign grace
- God works out his sovereign grace through promises of what he is going to do, such that we trust in his word
- God enters into formal agreements with us called “covenants”
- A covenant is an agreement based on a chosen relationship in which God promises to bless his people and humans choose to commit themselves to the terms and obligations set forth by God

# Abrahamic Covenant

- In his covenant with Abraham, God's grace is put on full display:  
“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”’  
([Gen 12:1–3](#))
- Abram travels from Ur → Haran → Promised land
- God would bless Abraham in two ways:
  - (1) he would become a great nation and so have a great name, and
  - (2) through him God would mediate blessing to all peoples on earth

# Abrahamic Covenant

- Significantly, each of those promises are subsequently ratified by **covenants**:
- [Genesis 15](#) represents the second stage in God's covenantal dealings with Abraham in terms of the national dimension of God's promise:

# Abrahamic Covenant: National Dimension

- <sup>6</sup> Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. <sup>7</sup> He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.” <sup>8</sup> But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”
- <sup>9</sup> So the LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.” <sup>10</sup> Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. <sup>11</sup> Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.
- <sup>12</sup> As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. <sup>13</sup> Then the LORD said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. <sup>14</sup> But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup> In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”
- <sup>17</sup> When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— (Gen 15:6-18)

# Abrahamic Covenant: National Dimension

- In ancient times, a covenant agreement was ratified by both parties walking down the aisle between torn apart animal pieces
- This is to signify what will happen to the party who breaks the promise
- In a stunning move, God walks the aisle all by himself, which is to say that he takes full unconditional responsibility to keep the promise
- God has, through the generations, preserved Abraham's chosen seed line, thus showing his sovereign grace to form a nation: Abraham → Isaac → Jacob (not Esau)
- Through this chosen seed line would come someone, who would bless all the nations

# Abrahamic Covenant: International Dimension

- The international dimension of the promise is alluded to in [Gen 17:1-7, 16](#)), where God announces an “everlasting covenant” (17:7):
- “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. <sup>2</sup> Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers. <sup>3</sup> Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, <sup>4</sup> “As for me, this is my **covenant** with you: You will be the father of **many nations**. <sup>5</sup> No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a **father of many nations**. <sup>6</sup> I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup> I will establish my covenant as **an everlasting covenant** between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (17:3-7)



# Abrahamic Covenant: International Dimension

- [Gen 22:1-18](#) describes *how* the Abrahamic covenant was ratified:
- <sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. <sup>9</sup> When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.
- <sup>12</sup> “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” <sup>13</sup> Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”
- <sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

# Abrahamic Covenant: International Dimension

- One may speculate what kind of God would ask a father to sacrifice his son?
- We need to read this passage, keeping in mind that the practice of human sacrifices was common to polytheistic gods at that time
- Point: Offering a human sacrifice is not what God wants. How can anyone possibly please God that way? In testing Abraham, God was actually testing Abraham, if he had the kind of faith in him that the pagans have of their false gods
- No, God alone provides for the sacrifice!
- This is the kind of God with whom we can have a relationship, not because he has needs and wants us to sacrifice our children, but because of his sovereign grace to provide a lamb

# Conclusion

- Paul says those who believe in Jesus—the gospel—is justified by faith and are (spiritual) children of Abraham
- <sup>6</sup> So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” <sup>7</sup> Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the **gospel** in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” <sup>9</sup> So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Gal 3:6-9; cf. Gen 12:3)

# Conclusion

- A Christian relates to God on the basis of God's saving grace
- A Christian is one who knows Jesus personally, depends upon him, and trusts in his word, such that he or she exercises active faith from of a heart of gratitude
- "It is not enough to believe the gospel with your head. It must become operational in your heart" (Tim Keller)
- "If you had asked Paul to define what a Christian is," Fee once [told](#) CT, "he would not have said, 'A Christian is a person who believes X and Y doctrines about Christ,' but 'A Christian is a person who walks in the Spirit, who knows Christ'" (Gordon Fee)