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Jacob's Ladder: Songs of Ascent in the Etymology of Israel's Covenants

My study of ancient religious concepts had produced some interesting results. Perplexingly, it raised more questions than it answered. Israel's religion appeared to have a concept of God that differed from other nations' concepts. YHWH was not unified with any other god, and his Law actually forbade the practice (Exod 20:3). However, this qualitative test was not capable of yielding comprehensive results. I still needed to study other areas of Scripture to see if they merited validity. Did they substantiate ancient Israel's accusations charging God with unrighteousness, or were the allegations false?

Israel's entire religion was based on YHWH's call of Abraham and blessings that YHWH established in several covenants. First, I needed to know if YHWH's supposed covenants with Abraham were historically valid. Second, I needed to understand what ideas, principles, or theology these covenants established.

I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A. Ancient Covenants

In order to understand Abraham's covenants, I had to place these covenants (also termed compacts and treaties) with God in their ancient Near Eastern context. George Mendenhall's landmark work on ancient treaties has transformed our entire understanding of ancient "covenants."¹ Although covenants as treaties existed throughout the ancient world, Israel's covenants most closely paralleled Hittite treaties of the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BCE.² There were basically three types of treaties: *suzerainty* treaties, which bound only

the inferior or weaker vassal by an oath to obey the king's commands (peasant to the king); the *parity* treaty that bound both parties to obey identical stipulations (treaties between kings);³ and the third type of treaty is the *royal grant*, one of the most common formulas that Scripture records, used especially in regard to land (1 Sam 8:14).⁴

The grant covenant constituted an obligation of the master to his servant. In the grant, a curse (a primary component of all ancient treaties, as we will see) is directed toward any entity who violates the rights of the king's vassal, while in the suzerainty treaty the curse is directed toward the vassal who violates the rights of his king. In other words, the grant served mainly to protect the rights of the *servant*, while the suzerainty treaty protected the rights of the *king*. What is more, while the grant is a reward for loyalty and good deeds already performed, the suzerainty treaty is an inducement for future loyalty.⁵

Although debates have developed over the type of treaty (suzerainty vs. grant) on which Israel's covenants were based, we will see that all three types of treaties are found in Israel's foundational covenants.⁶

Ancient covenants of the fourteenth century BCE followed a basic yet formal pattern.⁷ (1) The document began with a preamble or title that identified the author of the covenant.⁸ (2) The preamble was followed by a historical prologue or retrospect, citing previous relations and affinity between the covenantor and the covenantee.⁹ (3) The third part outlined the stipulations or obligations laid on the vassal by the sovereign.¹⁰ (4) The ancient treaty called for its deposit in the national sanctuary and (5) a periodic public reading.¹¹ (6) In the sixth division of a covenant, witnesses were listed.¹² One prominent feature of (7) ancient covenants recorded *curses for breach of pact* and (8) *blessings for compliance* with the covenant's stipulations.¹³ (9) The ninth act of compliance was a self-imprecating oath taken to obey the treaty's stipulations, which was usually sealed by a sacrifice.¹⁴ (10) The tenth feature and the only aspect that distinguished Israel's religious treaties from Hittite treaties was the sign of compliance that accompanied the covenant (Gen 15:17; Exod 31:13, 17; Deut 6:8; 11:18).

Israel's covenants were by very nature *parity* treaties (contra Mendenhall). If YHWH did not obey his own treaty of disallowing other gods, he could erect competing deities equal or superior to himself. Or, when he judged Israel, he could discipline her—not for breaching the stipulations of his covenant—but for any other miscellaneous infraction that perturbed him, in an arbitrary fashion that was similar to the gods throughout the ancient Near East. Our whole investigation hinges on YHWH's covenants with Israel functioning as parity treaties. If YHWH did not bind himself to the same Law that he required Israel to obey, the nation's charges of unfairness and arbitrary judgments would be substantiated.¹⁵ Therefore, we will continue to consider the evidence to see whether YHWH is righteous by adhering to his own Law (parity) or is arbitrary by requiring man's obedience to the covenantal Law without acting consistently with the Law himself (suzerainty).

B. Features of Ancient Covenants in Scripture

I have discovered that it is important to have a thorough understanding of how each of these covenant features work. I found that there was no set order for how these 10 covenant

features appeared in ancient covenants in Scripture. However, the preamble and historical prologue usually preceded all other elements. Additionally, some covenants would drop one or two of these 10 features. For instance, the requirement for deposit and periodic public reading is not mentioned in the patriarchal covenants until these covenants are formally ratified again with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai.

Preamble or Title. Covenants were binding agreements. Scriptural covenants always begin with God's addressing the one with whom he is covenanting.¹⁶ In modern times, the most famous preamble is that of the U.S. Constitution, which begins, "We the people." This statement signifies that the people are granting to themselves their own Constitutional Covenant based on their God-given divine right (a right, which historically had only been granted to kings). In Scripture, preambles or titles are usually identified by a form of direct address, such as "God spoke to—." Sometimes God speaks directly to someone as he did with Noah (Gen 8:15), or he may appear in a vision as he did to King Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5; see also Gen 15:1; 28:12). In some instances, he uses an angel or messenger to speak his words as he did with Abram and Jacob (Gen 22:11; 18:1; 32:24) or through a burning bush (Exod 3:2). In each case, the text specifies that God or God's agent is addressing someone. Within the words that follow God's appearance to a patriarch, we usually find the basic features of ancient covenants (i.e., stipulations, promises, blessing, curses, etc.).

Historical Prologue. The historical prologue mentions previous interactions or relationship between God and the person or family with whom he is covenanting.¹⁷ We often find this formula in the statement referring to the covenant "which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Gen 50:24; Exod 13:5; Deut 4:21), which is mentioned over 70 times in the Tanakh (or Old Testament). In the covenant that Israel made with YHWH at Mt. Sinai, the prologue states:

I am YHWH your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (Exod 20:2)

Since the covenant made at Mt. Sinai and the covenant made on the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy) 40 years later basically incorporated the same stipulations, many features, such as the historical prologue and stipulations remained the same (Deut 5:6). The most significant differences between these two covenants, as we will see, were the means by which they were ratified and the sign for compliance.

Stipulations. Every covenant has something specific it requires.¹⁸ The stipulations are binding both on YHWH and the patriarchs, and on YHWH and the nation of Israel. By their very nature, these are parity stipulations. God cannot change these stipulations or dismiss their relevance (see the foundation of this case in chap. 1). In Hittite covenants, we find that the stipulations defined a term of service that was required in exchange for some sort of compensation, whether money or provisions such as food and clothing.¹⁹ Israel's covenants work the same way. God never requires something for nothing. He always pays for the benefit received. This means that these covenants are parity covenants and are mutually

beneficial. The stipulations require such things as: not ingesting an animal's blood (Gen 9:4), refraining from murder (Gen 9:6), being circumcised (Gen 17:11), and the most famous stipulation is the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20). These are 10 categories or precepts that define the Torah doctrine since the entire Torah Law can be broken down into one of these 10 categories that define how humanity should interact with God and how people should interact with each other.

Safeguarding and deposit. Almost every ancient covenant required that it be deposited and safeguarded in the local temple.²⁰ Temples were not only responsible for ideals about God; they were the legal administrators of their district.²¹ Although the early patriarchal covenants do not record this feature, the national Sinai covenant was the first biblical covenant that does (Exod 25:16).

You shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you. (Exod 25:16).

The *Testimony* was YHWH's formal covenant with Israel (Exod 32:15–16; 34:28). It was separate from the *Law of Moses*, which included the more practical matters of applying the constitution's philosophy or precepts in legal proceedings. Once the Testimony was placed in the ark, the ark became known as the *Ark of the Testimony* (Exod 25:16, 21; 31:7; Deut 10:1–5; 31:24–8; Josh 4:16) or the *Ark of the Covenant* (Num 10:33; 14:44; Deut 10:8; 31:9, 25–26). Once the ark that bore the Testimony was installed in the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle became known as the *Tabernacle of Testimony* (Exod 38:21; Num 1:50; 10:10). The significance in this is stated in Exodus 25.

Put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark you shall put the *testimony*. . . . *There I will meet with you, and I will commune with you* from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of *the testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment unto the children of Israel.* (Exod 25:21–22)

The importance of this statement is that all discussions God would have with Moses or anyone else for that matter would be based on the Testimony, which resided under the Mercy Seat. The Testimony would define the morals, ethics, rights, and responsibilities between individuals, and between individuals and the state, in the same manner as the United States Constitution is designed to do today. But more than the U.S. Constitution, Israel's constitutional covenant, as we will see, defined truth and doctrine for Israel and her descendants (Ps 119:142). Any conversation that God would have with humanity would be based on Israel's constitutional Testimony.

Periodic Public Reading. While other ancient Near Eastern nations may have had varying years in which the treaty was to be read,²² in Israel it was read every seven years.

And Moses commanded them, saying, *At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles*, when all Israel is come to appear before YHWH your God in the place which he shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and your stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear YHWH your God, and observe to do all the words of this law. (Deut 31:10–12)

Of this provision, George Mendenhall opines,

This stipulation is almost self-explanatory. Since it was not only the vassal king, but his entire state which was bound by the treaty, periodic public reading served a double purpose: first, to familiarize the entire populace with the obligations to the great king; and second, to increase the respect for the vassal king by describing the close and warm relationship with the mighty and majestic Emperor which he enjoyed. Since the treaty itself was under the protection of the deity, it was deposited as a sacred thing in the sanctuary of the vassal state—perhaps also, to indicate that the local deity or deities would not and could not aid in breach of covenant.²³

Although this feature may be self-explanatory, Mendenhall and other scholars miss a very important point in regard to Israel's covenant. Every time this covenant was read publicly, the people renewed or "pledged again" to uphold the stipulations set forth within the covenant. Probably the best example of covenant renewal is found during King Josiah's reign, when the Testimony (i.e., the Deuteronomy Covenant) had been rediscovered in the Temple. After the priests had asked the prophetess Huldah about the validity of the Testimony's curses (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22), Josiah gathered the people together to renew the covenant:

And all the people, both small and great: and he (Josiah) read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of YHWH. And the king stood by a pillar and *made a covenant before YHWH*, to walk after YHWH, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And *all the people stood to the covenant*. (2 Kgs 23:2–3)

When the people "stood to the covenant," they were assenting to obey its stipulations. Israel's people pledged to follow this covenant wholeheartedly for another seven years.

Witnesses. Most ancient covenants contained a long list of gods as witnesses to uphold and enforce the penalties. In Israel's covenants, the witnesses include God and the person with whom he is covenanting. In the Circumcision Covenant, God stated that he was covenanting "between me and you" (Gen 17:2). The covenants made at Mt. Sinai and Shechem are contracted with the children of Israel (Exod 20:2; Deut 29:1–2).

One interesting example of a covenant's witnesses is a covenant that was not between God and a patriarch but was initiated by Jacob's father-in-law, Laban. In this covenant, Laban invokes several gods as witnesses to his covenant with Jacob:

The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us. And Jacob swore by the fear of his father, Isaac. (Gen 31:53)

Laban appears to be invoking three different gods as witnesses to his and Jacob's pact. Rather than swear by a false deity, Jacob cleverly sidesteps the issue and simply swears by the fear of his father, Isaac. This may imply that Isaac ultimately feared YHWH; therefore, Jacob is swearing by Isaac's God. Whatever the case may be, Jacob does not assent swearing by another god or acknowledging other deities as witnesses.

Oath, seal, ratification. The oath and seal compare to signing one's name to a contract in modern times. The oath to obey the covenant was usually part of a ceremony and most often included self-imprecating sacrifices (see the patriarchal covenants below).²⁴ Not all covenants were ratified by blood. The Moab-Shechem covenant was ratified in the ceremony that placed the curses on Mt. Ebal and the blessings on Mt. Gerizim (Deut 11:29). The Circumcision Covenant was ratified by the literal act of circumcision. **The importance of this feature is that the covenantee gave verbal assent to live by the covenant's stipulations and to accept its consequences, if breached.** When this ceremonial oath accompanied sacrifice, the person consenting to the covenant would often slit an animal's throat and say something to the effect of "may what happens to this animal occur to me and my descendants if we do not uphold all the words of this covenant to do them" (see below). Thus this ceremony sealed the person and their descendants to uphold the covenant and to reap both its blessings and consequences.

One interesting record of covenant-making occurred after Athaliah (King Ahab's daughter) had oppressed the Kingdom of Judah for seven years.

And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of YHWH, and *made a covenant with them, and took an oath* of them in the house of YHWH, and showed them the king's son. (2 Kgs 11:4)

The recorded oath in this text signified that Judah's aristocracy had assented to Jehoiada's covenant to install the rightful Davidic heir and to defend him. Fascinatingly, when Jehoiada and the rulers made Joash king, they installed him with the Testimony in his hand.

Then they brought out the king's son, and put on him the crown, and *gave him the testimony*, and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king. (2 Chr 23:11)

Jehoiada deliberately invested Joash with the Testimony. In English history, this compares to giving King John the *Magna Carta*. The Testimony, as we will see, defined: the limits on the king's power; his responsibility to God and the people; the laws by which he should rule and uphold; and the consequences that he and his people would face for breaching the covenant. Thus, reading the Testimony every seven years and making sure the people were aware of its stipulations were two of the king's primary responsibilities.

Blessings. There is a philosophy in Torah that the blessings enumerated in the covenants were not effected simply because an individual (or a community) was the seed of Abraham or had inherited the covenants. Keeping the covenant's stipulations naturally effected the promised blessings. This was mentioned, for example, shortly before God destroyed Sodom, when his messenger said,

For I know (Abraham), that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of YHWH, to do justice and judgment; *that YHWH may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him.* (Gen 18:19)

Notice the conditional nature of this statement. Blessings were not given simply because Abraham had covenanted with YHWH or simply because Abraham was a Hebrew (Gen 14:13). Blessings came from Abraham's observing and walking in *the way of YHWH*. This idea or philosophy is reiterated again in Deuteronomy's Moab-Shechem Covenant (Deut 28–30:14).

Keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, *that it may go well with you*, and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days on the earth, which YHWH your God gives you, *forever.* (Deut 4:40)

Observe and hear all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you *forever*, when you do that which is good and right in the sight of YHWH your God. (Deut 12:28; see also Exod 19:5–6; Lev 26:2–4; Deut 5:16; 11:13)

The idea conveyed in these statements is that, not only does obeying YHWH's stipulations cause life to "go well" with humanity, but the Law he gave to Moses embraces *natural law*. Therefore, this covenant feature enumerated specific benefits from adhering to YHWH's philosophical life-style, including that a society could live "forever" (Deut 4:40; 12:28).

Curses. Just as obeying the Covenantal Law effects its own blessings, so disobeying it results in curses. Disobedience is a violation of natural Law. The "curses of the covenant" enumerated the specific consequences for breach of covenant. It is this feature, as we will see, that became known as Israel's formal *Testimony* (Exod 34:28; 32:15–16; Isa 8:16, 20). King David stated that "The secret of YHWH is with them that fear him; and he will show them

his covenant” (Ps 25:14). In part two of this book, we will examine the covenant’s Testimony to see if it is one of YHWH’s greatest secrets.

Sign of compliance. This feature appears to have been unique to Israel’s covenants. It was a special feature that acknowledged both acceptance and compliance. It was also a means by which either party could “look on” and determine very quickly whether the other party was in compliance with the covenant. When Noah offered YHWH a sacrifice, for instance, YHWH gave Noah a promise and sealed that promise with the sign of the rainbow: never again to destroy the entire earth by flood (Gen 9:16). In the Circumcision Covenant, YHWH provided a sign by changing Abraham’s (Gen 17:5) and Sarah’s names (Gen 17:15); the act of circumcision itself became a sign of Abraham’s and Sarah’s compliance with the pact. In the later Sinai Covenant, the observance of the Sabbaths was the sign by which Israel is recognized to be in compliance.

Surely my sabbaths you shall keep: for *it is a sign between me and you* throughout your generations; that you may know that I am YHWH that does sanctify you. You shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy to you: every one that defiles it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever does any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. (Exod 31:12–14)

Because many of YHWH’s promises were made with the early patriarchs, these covenants were prophetic in nature and were fulfilled in the course of history. A covenant’s “sign” is especially important in the context of Scripture, because it can contain a “window” into another prophecy.²⁵ Often Israel’s covenants had the added feature (beyond Mendenhall’s list) of an actual prophecy—i.e., something that would occur in the covenantee’s (or his or her descendant’s) future.²⁶

Finally, every patriarchal and national covenant upheld and reissued the previous covenant. In other words, covenants build on each other by simply incorporating new stipulations and promises. There exists not one single instance in all of the Old Testament (Tanakh) where a covenant, stipulation, promise, blessing or curse was ever revoked, changed, or rescinded (as we will see throughout this chapter). Instead, one covenant often fulfilled an earlier covenant or prophecy. Tracing these covenants as they originated greatly aids our understanding of the various statutes ordained in the later national Israelite covenants. At this point, we will focus on the precepts that Israel’s Scriptures establish for her God. Then, we will turn to more scientific data (see Table 3.1).

II. COVENANTS

In the process of time, YHWH enacted covenants with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the nation of Israel, Phinehas, David, and Solomon. Although the entire nation of Israel inherited her patriarch’s covenants and blessings, the entire nation did not have a claim to covenants that YHWH made between individuals or families in Israel. For instance,

Table 3.1. Covenants of the Late Second Millennium BCE

1	<i>Preamble or title</i>	Identifies the author/grantor of the covenant
2	<i>Historical Prologue</i>	Mentions previous relationships with kindred
3	<i>Stipulations</i>	States what is required of the party accepting the treaty
4	<i>Storage or Deposition</i>	To be safeguarded in cultic sanctuary
5	<i>Periodic public reading</i>	Remembering and renewing of covenant
6	<i>Witnesses</i>	Long list of gods invoked to witness the covenant
7	<i>Oath</i>	Sealed or ratified by self-imprecation through sacrifice
8	<i>Promises for compliance</i>	Blessings
9	<i>Penalty for breach</i>	Curses
10	<i>Sign (Israel)</i>	An act, feature, or sign that demonstrates compliance

YHWH offered Aaron's son Phinehas a *covenant of peace* (Num 25:12). This covenant applied only to Phinehas and his descendants. Other Levites or Aaronic descendants were ineligible for the promises of Phinehas's covenant. It was a separate covenant within the Sinai compact.

Covenants defined the parameters of YHWH's truth. As we will see, the later Israelite Law predicated and incorporated all of YHWH's previous covenants with humanity. I discovered that understanding the history of these covenants allows us to chart clearly the words of promise and requirements of responsibility that YHWH spoke to humanity. In studying these covenants, we should be able to reconstruct a clear picture of Abraham's religious system so that we can see how or whether it differed from those of the rest of the ancient world.

III. NOAHIC COVENANT

After the flood, YHWH contracted a covenant with Noah and his descendants. This covenant originated with Noah's offering a sacrifice, once he was safely delivered from the ark (Gen 8:20–22). God responded to Noah's offering by extending a contractual relationship to Noah and his children in a *royal grant* treaty. Scholars recognize that the patriarchal covenants did not follow the suzerain form typical of the later national covenants, although they did share some common points.²⁷

One of the first benefits that the Creator promised to Noah was that he would never “cut off all flesh any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there anymore be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen 9:11). The rainbow was YHWH's “sign” or seal of the Noahic Covenant. I have found that retracing the stipulations of this covenant and evidencing its various provisions shed abundant light on the foundation of YHWH's truth.

The following text is the Noahic Covenant as recorded in Genesis 8 beginning with v. 15. Parentheses inserted into the Scriptural text indicate the aspects that we will examine afterward. (All covenants will be featured with a grey background.)

Preamble

And God spake to Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark, you, and your wife, and your sons, and your sons' wives with you. Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creeps on the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. (Gen 8:15–17)

Historical Prologue

And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creeps on the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. (Gen 8:8:18–19)

Noah's Oath or seal

And Noah built an altar to YHWH; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And YHWH smelled a sweet savor. (Gen 8:20)

YHWH's Oath or seal: Stipulation binding on YHWH

And YHWH said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; *neither will I again smite any more every thing living*, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. (Gen 8:21–22)

Promises

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, (a) Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

(b) And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, and on every fowl of the air, on all that moves on the earth, and on all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. (Gen 9:1–3)

Stipulations

But (c) flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the *hand of every beast* will I require it, and at the *hand of man*; at the *hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man*.

(d) Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

(e) And you, be you fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein. (Gen 9:4–7)

The Covenant's Sign

And God spoke to Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and (f) with your seed after you; (g) And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.

(h) And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. (i) And God said, This is the *token* of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for *perpetual generations*: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and (g, above) every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look on it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. And God said to Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth. (Gen 9:8–17)

As the first recorded compact, Noah's Covenant establishes a pattern of promises of blessings and consequences of penalties to which all subsequent covenants will adhere. The preamble and prologue tell us that Noah, his family, and the animals have recently come out of the ark. Noah initiates a covenant with God through an oath of sacrifice. YHWH accepts this oath stating that he will never again "destroy every living thing" and that seasons should remain in place. The first blessing YHWH garnishes on Noah's family is the ability to have (a, above) a multitude of children. YHWH commands Noah and his family to actively pursue large families. As we will later see when we examine Abraham's covenants, humanity's need to repopulate the flooded earth was not YHWH's only reason for this blessing.

Striking distinctions can be observed between man's harsh state before the flood and his prosperity after the Noahic compact was contracted. The first marked distinction between Adam (b, above) and Noah's descendants was a "fear" that had been put on the animals for the sake of Noah's children.

Gen 9:4 (c) is the second place where Scripture records consequences for a breach of pact.²⁸ YHWH's covenant with Noah commanded: "Do not eat the blood of flesh." The *hidden judgment* for breaching this command warned that YHWH would require the offender's life at the hand of *each man's brother*, other men, and beasts.²⁹ If humanity consumed animals' blood while eating meat, the Creator would use these *three* venues to render judgment. He also enacted a penalty for manslaughter and bloodguilt by establishing that (d) "life would be given for life." This penalty formed the foundation of the bloodguilt doctrine that was reiterated in the later Israelite Law.

And your eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deut 19:21; see also Exod 21:23)

YHWH removes humanity's pre-flood curses in Gen 9:7. Lamech's prophecy for Noah is fulfilled, and the curse on the soil is lifted, because the earth will now yield its bounty (Gen 5:28–29). YHWH restores man's ability to have children, as the curse (e) on Ham's seed

is repealed. Although Cain's lineage survived the flood through Ham's marriage to Naamah, Cain's seed will no longer be withheld, as YHWH blesses Noah's children so that humanity can be fruitful and replenish the earth.

The (f) "recipient party" of Noah's Covenant included Noah, his sons, and their future offspring; thus, all humanity is a legal party to this binding agreement. Remarkably, humans were not the only covenantee. Animals (g) were also recipients of YHWH's covenant³⁰ and were ensured certain rights of justice when man "ate their flesh with the blood."³¹

Noah's Covenant appears to have set a precedent for formal treaties that ancient and modern nations continued to follow. In ancient times, both parties were required to offer a sign or seal to the agreement. While today we use a personal signature to "seal" compliance, sacrifices were the most common means of ratifying covenants and treaties throughout the ancient world. Thankfully, many ancient documents exist to clarify the exact role that the sacrifice played in the ratifying process.

One great example is an eighth century treaty that reads, "As this calf is cut to pieces so may Mati'el be cut to pieces," thus sealing Mati'el to the same fate as the sacrificial calf should he violate the treaty's stipulations.³² In another ancient Near Eastern treaty, the donor king vows: "(May I be cursed) if I take back what I gave you,"³³ again sealing the consequential fate of the covenantor. Another eighth century (BCE) Assyrian document likewise attests:

This ram was not taken from its flock for sacrifice. . . . If Mati'ilu (shall violate) the covenant and oath to the gods, then, as this ram, which was taken from its flock and to its flock will not return, and at the head of its flock shall not stand, so Mati'ilu with his sons . . . shall violate this covenant . . . as the head of this ram shall be struck off so shall his head be struck off.³⁴

This text vividly outlines the consequences for breaching a treaty. *The sacrifice accompanying the sealing of a covenant depicted the fate of the one who benefited from the covenant if he should breach the stipulations to which he had agreed.*³⁵ In parity treaties, both parties would bear the "curse of death" symbolized by the sacrifice if they failed to uphold the ratified treaty.³⁶

The significance of this act may have varied from country to country and from century to century, although there seems to be a fairly *consistent interpretation of the act as a kind of self-imprecation, as though the participants in the treaty would say, 'If I break the treaty may this happen to me'*. In the Old Testament the practice is clearly described in several passages, and may be inferred in others. In the ancient Near East it was certainly in use in the eighteenth century BC at Mari and Alalah while in the first millennium BC it is attested among the Aramaeans in the eighth century and among the Assyrians in the eighth and seventh centuries.³⁷

Hence, Noah's sacrifice (Gen 8:20–21) quite literally "sealed" his fate and his children's fate should any of them fail to uphold the terms that YHWH set forth in his covenant for their benefit. YHWH's sign or seal of Noah's Covenant promised (h) that a flood would

Table 3.2. Noah's Covenant

<i>Promise</i>	Gen 8:21	Never again kill every living thing (unconditional)
	8:22	Seasons will remain constant (unconditional)
	9:11–15	Never will there be a worldwide flood again (unconditional)
<i>Recipients/Prologue</i>	9:9, 17	Humankind and animals and their posterity
<i>Stipulation</i>	9:4	Do not eat the blood of animals
	9:6	Do not murder mankind
	9:5–6	Precept for judgment: life for life
<i>Oath</i>	8:20–21	Noah's burnt offering
	8:21	YHWH's oath to never again "destroy every living thing"
<i>Blessing</i>	9:1, 7	Fruitfulness of humanity
	9:22–9:1	Fruitful land
	9:2–3	Animals become fearful of humans
<i>Curse or Consequence</i>	9:5	Death by animals (national war)
	9:5	Death by fellow man (civil war)
<i>Sign</i>	9:12–17	Rainbow

never again destroy all flesh, nor would a flood ever again destroy the earth. The sign that YHWH provided for the Noahic Covenant (i) as proof of YHWH's promise was a rainbow to "perpetual" or all future "generations," who were also recipients of Noah's Covenant.

In this grant treaty, YHWH bound himself to uphold the value judgments expressed in the covenant. This negated his right to offer any other treaty or covenant that violated these foundational principles. Equally, YHWH limited himself to never again sending a worldwide flood and to never again "smite every thing living" (Gen 8:21). This covenant indeed benefited both parties. YHWH benefited from the treaty by never having to destroy the earth again by a flood. He also profited from having a people who could follow a basic value system that enabled them to govern themselves. Noah and his progeny benefited from a defined value system on which to base their societies. Noah's descendants also profited from YHWH's self-imposed ban on the use of a global flood as a means of judgment (see Table 3.2).

At this point in my study, I wondered if any society had adhered to the ideals of justice as defined in Noah's Covenant. If so, it may further evidence that these values were history and not folklore. Interestingly, I found that ancient societies indeed embraced the same basic values in regard to justice. In the Hammurabi Code (196–97), King Hammurabi (c. 1728 BCE) reiterates the concept of a life given for a life as an "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth," just as expressed in Noah's treaty (Gen 9:6).³⁸ Thus, at least in very ancient times, there is evidence that some ancient nations indeed embraced the ideals associated with the Noahic Covenant granting historical credence to its validity. Next, I needed to see other values or history that the Hebrew Scriptures defined as truth.

IV. NOAH DEFINES PROPHECY

After the flood, an event occurred that forever altered the prosperity of Ham's descendants. After waking from his wine,

Noah . . . knew what his younger son had done to him. And he said, *Cursed* be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers. And he said, *Blessed* be YHWH God of Shem; and *Canaan shall be his servant*. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and *Canaan shall be his servant*. (Gen 9:24–28)

Although this text treats Ham's offense evasively,³⁹ we know his malfeasance was severe enough for Noah to disinherit his younger son. With the entire earth's resources before him, the greatest assets that Noah possessed were: (1) the covenants that YHWH had granted to him, (2) land, and (3) his children's future. Knowing that his family hallmarked a new epoch in the earth's history, he used these resources to curse Ham's youngest son, Canaan.

There are two parts to Noah's prophecy. First, Noah removes a "birthright" from Ham, ceding it to Shem. Thus, *Shem and his children inherit a double birthright (or double portion)*, while Canaan and his descendants inherit their father's curse. As we will see, Noah's blessing of Shem, set the stage for YHWH to pass Shem's blessing to Abraham.

Second, Noah prophesies that Japheth will possess a spacious land and live within Shem's double birthright. The nature and context of Noah's words indicate that Shem's double blessing will be a land with double the area of Japheth's. The second part of this prophecy consigns Ham's children, Canaan, to be servants to *both* Shem and Japheth's descendants.⁴⁰ If Canaan's descendants become a landless people, they will naturally have to sell their labor since their society will not possess natural resources to sell or trade. Throughout history, people who do not own land tend to live in poverty, servitude, and serfdom. Noah's prophecy still functioned by one basic premise: during times of righteousness, his cursed offspring would not always bear the consequences of the curse. When, however, his children rebelled against the Noahic Covenant and YHWH's laws, the penalty of this curse would be applied.

If Scripture is true, it is from the Noahic Covenant and Noah's prophecy that *all* subsequent Scriptural covenants and prophecies will follow with constancy. Does Scripture or history reveal that Noah's prophecy has come to pass? Did Canaan's descendants become servants to Shem and Japheth?

A. *Ham Serves Shem*

In the opening chapter I discussed the importance of Scripture's truth supporting real facts and historical events. Unlike the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Gilgamesh*, or Aesop's fables, which teach a moral lesson yet lack historical validity, Israel's Scripture needs to distinguish itself as comprising historical truths. Otherwise, this quest for reliability is as vain as searching for traces of the Cyclops on Crete. Scripture's promises, blessings, consequences, and prophecies must demonstrate historical validity for this case to be credible. In my quest for truth,

I needed to see if history confirms Noah's prophecies. This test should allow us to see if this portion of Scripture is a word of truth or mere folklore.

Noah's prophecy was initiated before Israel became a nation. Elam was Shem's first-born son (Gen 10:22) and would have been eligible to inherit Shem's double portion. When Abraham settled in Hebron, Ham's Canaanite descendants had served the Elamite king Chedorlaomer for 12 years (Gen 14:4).⁴¹ Some 400 years later, Shem's descendants through Abraham occasionally dominated the Canaanites.⁴² The strongest subjugations occurred during the days of Joshua, Judges, and later under David, Solomon, and Hezekiah. However, Israel's domination over Canaan was often thwarted by her own idolatry. So the question is: were Noah's words still binding during the times when Israel apostatized or when her military strength waned?

External evidence is found in Assyrian archives. Asshur, Shem's second eldest son, founded Nineveh. It is from Assur's name that the word *Assyria* is derived.⁴³ When Israel's power over Canaan waned, Shem's progeny, Assyria, still maintained lordship over Canaan. The first inscription regarding Assyria's domination over the Palestine region was written shortly before David's ascension. Tiglath-pileser I (1130–1090 BCE) tells us that he subjugated Lebanon, Sidon, and the entire country of Hatti.⁴⁴ Gen 15:20 lists the Hittites (Hatti) as Ham's descendants; thus, Assyria had mastery over the land belonging to Ham's offspring. In another inscription, Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) describes campaigns against the Hittites' remaining city-states, recording impressive tributes received from various Palestinian cities.⁴⁵ Following Ashurnasirpal II's ascension, almost every surviving Assyrian annal describes an invasion, subjugation, or deportation of Canaanite and Egyptian regions. Assyria's lordship over this territory reached its peak in the Third Intermediate and Late Period, when Esarhaddon conquered Egypt and established Necho I as his vassal.⁴⁶

About 75 years later, King Nebuchadnezzar inherited Palestine's territories by conquering Assyria. Scripture does not record Nebuchadnezzar's lineage; however, scholars reconstruct Babylonia's origins based on its language and culture, which reflect a West Semitic origin similar to Israel's.⁴⁷ Scholars find that many Babylonian tribes (including the Chaldeans) were distant relatives of Abraham's clan.⁴⁸ Hence, Nebuchadnezzar inherited his right to subdue Canaan's tribal territories. Nebuchadnezzar's "Shemite" lineage allowed him to subjugate the Promised Land. Assyria and Babylon fulfilled Noah's prophecy when Israel's prowess declined. However, Noah's words stipulated that Ham's descendants would serve not only Shem's descendants but Japheth's as well. Does history evidence the fulfillment of this aspect of Noah's prophecy as well?

B. Ham Serves Japheth

Although Egypt was usually unaffected by Noah's prophecy, during times of *unrighteousness* this curse also appears to have occurred in Egypt's history since Ham is implicated in what happened to Noah (Gen 9:22, 24). While this curse in no way ceded Ham's territory in Egypt to another people, it often affected the freedom Ham's children enjoyed. The first time we clearly see Egypt oppressed by foreigners was during the Second Intermediate Period (1800–1500).⁴⁹ During this era, Egypt was split in two and her kings driven out of the wealthy northern Delta region leaving all but a small petty Egyptian kingdom.⁵⁰ Although scholars

recognize these invaders as Asiatics,⁵¹ the prophet Isaiah recognizes an “Assyrian” (Isa 52:4) origin. Isaiah’s assertion may be supported by the numerous Assyrian personal names attested during this era.⁵² Although this information is not conclusive regarding the Shemite-Assyrian identity of Egypt’s conqueror, it is a possibility during the Second Intermediate Period.

Assyria did not long outlast her kings who deported the Canaanites from their native homes under Ashurnasirpal and Esarhaddon. Assyria fell to Nabopolassar of Babylon, and Babylon soon fell to Persia. When a monarch lacks a son to perpetuate his heritage (name and lineage), according to Scripture (Num 27:8), a surviving daughter was to be substituted for a firstborn son and rightful heir.⁵³

The ancient historian Herodotus tells us that Persia’s King Cyrus II was the grandson of the Median king Astyages, who was survived by an only daughter (Herod 1.75, 91).⁵⁴ If Cyrus was Astyages’ sole heir, Cyrus (through his mother—Astyages’ only surviving offspring) carried not only the lineage of his Median grandfather but also the crown of his Persian father, Cambyses, although Herodotus’ account is not without question.⁵⁵ According to the table of nations (Genesis 10), the Medes (Madai) were Japheth’s descendants. When Cyrus inherited Canaan’s territory from Babylon, he fulfilled Noah’s words that Ham’s children would become Persia’s servants. Cyrus’s Madain-Persian lineage gave him the divine “right” to conquer lands formerly inhabited by Canaan’s seed. Cyrus’s line ended with his son’s death, and Darius (also a Mede) inherited Cyrus’s lordship over Egypt and the land of Canaan.

Darius’s sons exercised control over Canaan until Persia’s fall to Alexander, whose lineage can be traced to another Japheth clan, Javan, Japheth’s fourth son. His descendants are known as the *Ionians* or Greeks.⁵⁶ The Macedonians are a branch of the Greek family.⁵⁷ This is remarkable in light of the fact that Ham’s seed became servants to the Macedonian sons of Japheth when Alexander conquered Egypt and Canaan in 332 BCE. When Alexander died, one of his generals, Ptolemy, of the Lagid Dynasty (a Macedonian family) ruled over the land of Egypt until its fall to Rome.⁵⁸ For almost 300 years, the sons of Japheth, the Ptolemies, were the lords of Egypt and Canaan.

The whole burden of taxation was a heavy yoke upon the natives of the country (i.e., Egypt). The Greeks and Macedonians were not affected by it in the same measure as the Egyptians, for they were the conquerors and the Egyptians were the conquered. . . . Heavy compulsory labor such as the repair of canals, the paving of roads, and the construction of dykes, fell upon them alone. The natives were thus degraded to the level of people without rights, while the aliens ruled their country with a high hand.⁵⁹

Egypt bore the heavy Ptolemaic yoke, and although Javan’s lordship via the Ptolemies ended, it resurfaced with the Roman and later, Byzantine empires (Gomer, Tubal, Magog, Meshech—nations that also descended from Japheth—Gen 10:2). For well over 2,000 years, the children of Ham served Shem and Japheth’s offspring. Noah’s curse on Ham’s children came to pass in these nations’ early history, so their later history can be blessed (Gen 12:3).

The Noahic Covenant establishes the Creator’s initial “words of truth.” If YHWH is to be declared righteous and faithful, then all subsequent covenants, prophecies, and statutes

must be consistent with the words that YHWH spoke to Noah. Though YHWH had not given Noah a prophecy against Canaan, Noah's prophecy had been based on his son's actions (Gen 9:22, 24). YHWH upheld and honored Noah's prophetic curse because Noah was righteous (Gen 6:8–9). The Noahic Covenant and Noah's prophecy form the basis of all subsequent "words of YHWH" and Old Testament prophecies. I had identified the foundation of any truth God had given to humanity. Next, came the task of seeing if subsequent covenants upheld these ideals.

V. ABRAHAMIC COVENANTS

A. *Migration Covenant*

I discovered that the three Abrahamic Covenants, like the Noahic Compact, resemble royal grants since they do not display the common features of later Near Eastern suzerainty covenants, as the later Sinai Compact does.⁶⁰ As more of a prototype of later covenants, the Abrahamic covenants include the following three main aspects: (1) stipulations or requirements; (2) blessings for obedience (no curses are listed for non-compliance); and (3) a sign or seal.⁶¹ A sign or symbolic act that seals the patriarchal covenants is especially important, as we will see in our discussion below.

Table 3.3. The Four Abrahamic Covenants

<i>Migration</i>	<i>Promised-Land</i>	<i>Circumcision</i>	<i>Burnt-Offering</i>
Genesis 12:1–4	Genesis 15	Genesis 17	Genesis 22

Over the course of Abraham's life, YHWH covenanted four pacts: the Migration Covenant, the Promised-Land Covenant, the Circumcision Covenant, and the Burnt-Offering Covenant (see Table 3.3).⁶² Each covenant was prophetic in nature with binding agreements placed on both parties (YHWH and Abraham). YHWH agreed to provide certain blessings for Abraham and his offspring, while Abraham and his children agreed to obey one particular request. Before Abram left Chaldea (Gen 12:31), YHWH extended the promise of his covenants, saying,

Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, *to a land that I will show you*: And I (1) will make of you a great nation, and (2) I will bless you, and (3) make your name great; and (4) you shall be a blessing: And (5) I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and (6) in you shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Gen 12:1–3)

The stipulations of the Migration Covenant placed the greater burden on YHWH. The Creator asked Abram to migrate to a new country (stipulation), which meant leaving his native land and family ties. YHWH did not compel Abram or threaten him with misfortune should he choose to forgo this covenant. Rather, YHWH offered to reward Abram if he chose to enter into his covenant.⁶³

If Abram complied with YHWH's request to migrate, YHWH promised to: (1) make Abram's progeny a great nation; (2) bless Abram and (3) make his name famous to future generations; (4) cause Abram's life to bless others; and (5) protect Abram and his offspring. YHWH would act favorably toward those who sought Abram and his descendants' welfare while afflicting those who sought their hurt; and (6) he would guarantee that Abram's migration would allow all the families of the earth to be blessed by Abraham's compliance in relocating to another land. Thus, the six obligations of this treaty were YHWH's to fulfill.

The responsibility of accepting this covenant rested on Abram. If he migrated (the sign of acceptance), YHWH knew that Abram had entered a covenant with him. When Abram entered the land, he sealed his covenant with YHWH through sacrifice (Gen 12:7). Although custom usually bound both parties to offer sacrifice, Abram was the only party to oblige at this point. YHWH did not yet offer any sign on his part to seal this treaty but the promises to Abram and his descendants of inheriting the land of Canaan.

Abram passed through the land to the place of Sichem (Shechem), to the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And YHWH appeared to Abram, and said, To your seed will I give this land: and there built he an altar to YHWH, who appeared to him. (Gen 12:6–7, parenthesis added)

According to the genealogies listed in the Masoretic Text, at the time this promise was extended to Abram, Shem was still alive and saw both his blessing and his double-portioned birthright pass into Abram's hands (Gen 9:29; 11:10–31).⁶⁴ YHWH specifically bestowed the land of Canaan to Abram and his progeny. Notice that Scripture maintains the constancy of Noah's prophecy of dispossessing Canaan. YHWH's promise to Abram (in Genesis 12) served both to fulfill Noah's prophecy⁶⁵ by disinheriting Canaan and to define the parameters of future covenants that the Creator would grant to Abram and his offspring as the heirs of Shem's birthright and blessing (See Table 3.4).

Table 3.4. The Migration Covenant (Genesis 12)

<i>Preamble</i>	12:1, 7	YHWH reveals himself to Abram
<i>Stipulation</i>	12:1	Immigrate
<i>Promises</i>	12:1	<i>Shem's Birthright</i> : great nation; "land that I will show you."
	12:2–3	<i>Shem's Blessing</i> : material blessings; leadership of the nations
	12:2	Abram's name will become great
	12:3	He and his children's leadership will be a blessing to others
	12:2–3	YHWH empowers Abram's many children to inherit the blessing
	12:3	YHWH protects by bringing disaster on those who are against Abram and his descendants
	12:3	All of the earth will be blessed through Abram's offspring
<i>Penalties</i>		None. The grant covenant could be rejected without recourse
<i>Sign</i>	12:5–6	Abram immigrates to Canaan

B. Promised-Land Covenant

Abram was 75 years old when he accepted YHWH's covenant offer and migrated to Canaan (Gen 12:4). A short time later, harsh famines caused Abram to move to Egypt (Gen 12:10). When he returned to Canaan, YHWH gave Abram a vision that fulfilled the promise of land and offspring set forth in the Migration Covenant. Abram had been contemplating how YHWH would fulfill his promise of seed (offspring) when he and his wife were childless. This is the vision of the second Abrahamic Covenant. (Parentheses inserted into the text indicate topics that will be examined below.)

C. Historical Background of the Promised-Land Covenant

Abram's petition seeks satisfaction since YHWH has failed to deliver on his promise that Abram will have offspring. Without children, Abram's high steward would inherit his estate along with his covenants. YHWH acknowledges Abram's request, but gently reaffirms his promise to give Abram his own child.

Preamble

After these things the word of YHWH came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord YHWH, *what will you give me, seeing I go childless*, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me you have given no seed: and lo, one born in my house is mine heir. (Gen 15:1-3)

Stipulation and Promise of a Son

And, behold, the word of YHWH came to him, saying, (1) *This shall not be your heir*; but he that shall come forth (2) *out of your own bowels (me'ah)* shall be your heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, (3) Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you be able to number them: and he said to him, *So shall your seed be*. And (4) he believed in YHWH; and he *counted it to him for righteousness*. (Gen 15:4-6, parentheses added)

Historical Prologue

And he said to him, (a) *I am YHWH* that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it. (Gen 15:7)

Covenant's Sign

And he said, YHWH Adonai, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said to him, (b) Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took to him all these, and divided them in the middle, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. (c) And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and see, an horror of great darkness fell on him. (Gen 15:8-11)

Prophecy

And he said to Abram, Know of a surety that (d) your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they *shall afflict* them four hundred years; (e) And also that nation, whom they shall serve, *will I judge*: and (f) afterward shall they come out with great substance. And you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. But in the (g) fourth generation they shall come here again: (h) for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the (i) sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. (Gen 15:13–17)

Promise of Land

In the (j) same day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites. (Gen 15:18–21)

1. Part I: Stipulation and Promises

The Promised-Land Covenant fulfills the earlier promises in the Migration Covenant. YHWH offers this covenant as a grant since Abram has already obeyed YHWH's request and immigrated to Canaan.⁶⁶ YHWH is fulfilling the obligation that he previously assumed by means of the Migration Covenant. Abram had asked YHWH if his servant Eliezer would inherit his covenant (Gen 15:2). A contemporary Hurrian record reveals the context of Abram's question. The Nuzi documents show that it was customary during this era for servants of childless masters to inherit the former's estate.⁶⁷ The master "adopted" "an heir, called *ewuru* (CAD, IV, 415) in distinction to the direct heir, *aplu* (CAD, A/II, 173–77), who was a physical descendant. . . . The adopted son became the legally recognized heir to the estate."⁶⁸ Thus, Abram designates Eliezer as his *ewuru*⁶⁹ and questions YHWH if this legal maneuver is the means by which God will fulfill his promises to him.

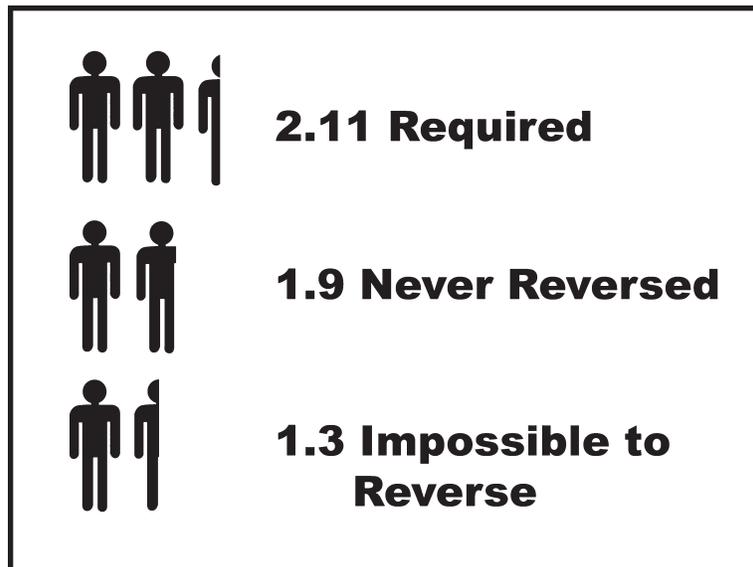
The only stipulation that YHWH makes in the Promised-Land Covenant is (1, above) both to forbid Eliezer to inherit Abram's covenants (or his estate) as an *ewuru* and to define the terms for inheriting YHWH's covenants. *Binding on both Abram and YHWH* is the stipulation that determines the means by which Abram's children (2, above) can inherit his covenants: only Abram's *me'ah* (*lit.*, sperm)⁷⁰ qualify to inherit YHWH's covenants.⁷¹ Even loyal, "adopted" servants may not substitute for Abram's physical offspring. *Abram had inherited Noah's and Shem's blessings because he was their physical descendant.* Likewise, only Abram's children were eligible for inheriting Canaan's land. Although Shem had other descendants who benefited from his blessings, only Abraham's descendants would benefit from YHWH's covenants with him, such as inheriting the Promised Land. The next blessing, however, was not exclusive.

YHWH, knowing the eternal value and worth of the family, (3, above) gave Abram the most powerful blessing on earth: children. (YHWH had first given this blessing to Noah in Gen 9:1, 7.) Not only would Abram's numerous children fill his heart with love and joy, but through them YHWH would fulfill his promise to make Abram's seed a mighty and powerful nation, to whom kings would listen and bow down. YHWH planned to use Abram's children to ensure a Torah-based culture and value system. Through the family, YHWH would build a mighty and righteous people who had the faith to live by his way of life and preserve its philosophical heritage for future generations.

Modern progressive societies often doubt the importance of large families. The socio-political attitude of America and many Western nations toward children is that they are simply another carbon footprint that depletes limited resources that society already has: children simply add to the earth's pollution, taxing limited resources. This philosophy, however, causes societies to collapse and fail because children are the strength and backbone of any nation's future.⁷²

In order for any country, culture, or society to survive, families must produce an average of 2.11 children per family.⁷³ At this rate, society simply replenishes the parents' generation (not accounting for large-scale disasters). If births fall to an average of 1.9 children per family, then the overall population of nations such as Russia, Canada, and the U. K. will be cut by 1/4 within a generation, or about 30 years. Societies that only produce 1.3 children per family eventually shrink and collapse. Eventually, other more prolific cultures will replace the nations that have dwindling populations (see Table 3.5).⁷⁴

Table 3.5. Population Sustainability



Modern-day Russia has become a victim of this crisis. Over the last 20 years, Russia's population has fallen exponentially. During a 16-year period beginning in 1976 (1976–1991), Russia had 36 million births.⁷⁵ Sixteen years later (1992–2007), however, the country experienced a 40% drop in the birth rate to only 22.3 million births. In 2005, Russia had a population of 143 million. This is expected to drop by about 20 million within 15 years to fall between 121 and 136 million by 2025.⁷⁶ The drop in birth rates has occurred due in large measure to the collapse of moral values. Marriage, in which 60% of women had participated in 1990, has dropped to less than 34% in 1996, because women opt for cohabitation relationships. With the decline of marriage, the popularity of abortion increased. Russian women had almost 13 abortions for every 10 live births in 2003.⁷⁷ Likewise, their depraved morals have led to the world's worst rates of death, induced by alcoholism and suicide.⁷⁸

What does all of this mean in practical terms? Well, first, Russia will have a significantly smaller labor force. This means less government revenue from taxable income and a smaller gross national product (GNP). This ultimately translates into a lower standard of living for Russian families and less dominance in the global market. Consequently, neither Russia nor its policies will have as much influence with other nations in future years.⁷⁹

Over the last few decades, the prevailing Western economic thinking is that a

decline in fertility should mean a better material environment for newborns and children because a shift to smaller desired family size (all else being equal) should signify an increase in parents' expected commitments to each child's education, nutrition, health care, and the like. Yet in post-Communist Russia, there are unambiguous indications of a worsening of social well-being for a significant proportion of the country's children—in effect, a disinvestment in children in the face of a pronounced downward shift in national fertility patterns.⁸⁰

Russia is only one country that demonstrates the ludicrousness of Western views on family fertility. Decrease in size of the family unit does not equal a better life-style for overall society but a worse overall socioeconomic status. The effect of Communism in post-Soviet Russia is not the abolition of capitalistic investments but an abolition of capitalism's most valuable resource—the family—as Marx himself had foreseen when writing the *Communist Manifesto*.⁸¹

Not only will Russia's standard of living and GNP decrease, her military prowess will be threatened as the population from which it can draw for its armed forces and with which it holds onto land diminishes. Ultimately, Russia's Communistic ideals have fulfilled Marxist prophecy of the “abolition of the family” because post-Communistic families possess no desire or incentive to reproduce. In realistic terms, abolition of the family is suicide for the nation. In the end, this means that other more prolific societies will dominate and eventually replace Russian society and its culture.

Why is a country or a culture's repopulation so important? Other nations, with better moral values will eventually replace deprived nations. Muslims, who uphold the value of proliferation, are overrunning most nations today. If, for instance, current population trends continue, Muslims will outnumber ethnic Russians in 30 years. There are now 25 million

Muslims in Russia, and they are projected to become 1/5 of the country's overall population by 2020. The *Washington Post's* foreign policy journal reports that

many ethnic Russians are terrified at the prospect of becoming a minority in their own country. Alexander Belov, from the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, said: "History is a fight between races and religions." It's the law of nature . . . people are used to being with people like themselves, speaking the language their mothers taught them.⁸²

Eventually, Russia faces the daunting reality of Muslim values' replacing traditional Russian values and the possibility that Sharia Law will replace the constitution of the Russian Federation. Since most Muslims have large families, their voice, power, and influence increase exponentially. This is especially true of nations, such as the U.S., in which "the fundamental principle is that the will of the majority is to prevail" (Thomas Jefferson).⁸³ In the end, the majority has the most power and will prevail over smaller cultures and populations. This is why YHWH granted Abram the gift of children, to ensure that his most powerful asset would not be dominated by societies that had grown corrupt.

When Abram heard YHWH's promises and understood his covenants, he believed the Creator's words and obediently acted on them. Because Abram (4) believed YHWH's promises and took YHWH at his word, the Creator credited Abram with righteousness. Thus, YHWH promised Abram that, if he and his children would believe his words and abide by them, they too would be righteous. Belief became the sign of Abram's compliance. These three promises became the underpinnings of the Promised-Land Covenant and all future covenants.

2. Part II: Foundation of the Covenant

The next section of the Promised-Land Covenant verifies who YHWH is and defines the consequence for breaching this pact. The Creator draws Abram's attention to who he is by (a) reestablishing the knowledge and importance of his name—YHWH. This is the same name Genesis' account tells us Eve had used when stating that "YHWH" had created her son (Gen 4:1). Enos, too, had used this name for God (Gen 4:26). Thus, according to Scripture, YHWH has been the name consistently attributed to the Creator since creation.

Once again YHWH seals his covenant with a sacrifice. The Creator asks Abram to prepare a five-part offering (b) consisting of a heifer, she-goat, and ram, each three years of age, and two undivided birds. In the evening time, (c) a "horror of great darkness" fell on Abram. The sacrifice that YHWH ordained for Abram to perform "depicts the self-destruction of the one making the contract in an analogous way: that the fate of the animal should befall him in the event that he does not keep the b^erit (covenant)."⁸⁴ Once again we see that sacrifice signaled the fate of the covenantee should he fail to uphold his pledge according to the covenant.⁸⁵

This interpretation is consistent with Jer 34:18, where the Israelites again used a divided sacrifice to seal their covenant with YHWH. Jeremiah does not leave the symbolism of sacrifice to mystical ideals but plainly states the covenantee's fate should he fail to uphold his or her end of the covenanted pledge.

I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have *not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in two, and passed between the parts of it*, The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, *which passed between the parts of the calf*. (Jer 34:18–19)

Jeremiah's prophecy demonstrates that this ceremony depicted the fate of those who failed to uphold their side of the covenant or in more modern terms "their end of the deal." Through this offering, Abram knew he would inherit the land promised to him if he complied. However, Abram had only prepared this sacrifice. It was YHWH—not Abram—who passed between the parts of a divided sacrifice *to seal his own compliance and his own fate should he fail to deliver on his promises to Abram*.⁸⁶

3. Part III: Fulfillment of Noah's Prophecy

YHWH promised Abram (j) Canaan's land as an eternal possession for his children. The land and its nations (vv. 18–21) effectively covered all of Ham's descendants except for Mizraim's offspring in Egypt. The "hidden" prophecy in the Promised-Land Covenant judged Mizraim and established Abram and his children as the heir of Shem's double portion of the birthright.⁸⁷ YHWH specifically promised Canaan's land to Abram, a land that Noah removed from Canaan and promised to Shem's progeny.

4. Hidden Judgment Prophecy

The Promised-Land Covenant patterns the Noahic Covenant's model of penalty and judgment. YHWH foretells that Egypt will (d) afflict Israel. This situation will provoke YHWH to render (e) a Day of Judgment against the people that oppress them. Scholars observe that as early as the Old Kingdom (c. 2686–2181 BCE), Egypt dealt with national labor shortages through "forcible appropriation of people arbitrarily taken from the lands of one institution and forced to work on behalf of a different organization," usually temple-state organizations.⁸⁸ At the time that YHWH spoke this prophecy to Abram, Egypt had already established a tradition for oppressing and enslaving innocent people, especially those tied to agrarian careers.⁸⁹ Since Abram and his family were shepherds (Gen 46:32–34), YHWH knew that they would be an easy prey for Egypt's temple organizations.

When the time arose for YHWH to judge Egypt, the Creator would compensate Abram's children (f) by granting them their oppressor's wealth (gained by Israel's labor). According to Exod 9:16, the reason YHWH hardened Pharaoh's heart during the exodus plagues was "to show in you my power; and that my *name* may be declared throughout all the earth." Indeed, the exodus is one of the most-told Old Testament stories. If Israel had not migrated to Egypt, there would have been little cause for YHWH to show his power. The exodus not only delivered Israel; it also memorialized YHWH's fame for future generations, thus enabling us to talk and write about it today.

Gen 15:13 states that Abraham's seed (d) would serve Egypt 400 years. Most scholars define a generation as 20–30 years;⁹⁰ however, YHWH does not use the term *generation* in the modern sense. Rather, the term is used to describe the life-span of a generation. According to the genealogy of Exodus 6, four generations spanned Israel's migration to Egypt through her exodus from Egypt. Levi, immigrated to Egypt and lived to 137 years of age (Exod 6:16), his son Kohath lived to be 133 years old (Exod 6:18), and his grandson Amram lived to be 137 years of age (Exod 6:20). These *three* generations spanned 407 years. Moses was in the fourth generation and delivered Israel out of Egypt when he was 80 years old (Exod 7:7). Gen 15:16 adds the fourth generation (g), Moses' generation, to the 400 years (comprising the first three generations). Thus, the total time elapsed from migration to exodus should be approximately 420–30 years.

Interestingly, YHWH does not hand over Canaan to Abram at the time he contracted the Promised-Land Covenant because the Amorites' sins (h) had not yet "come to their fullness." Canaan had not become totally steeped in idolatry. The Creator could not render judgment against the Amorites by confiscating their land and fulfilling Noah's prophecy until their sins were completely degenerate.⁹¹ *If he had, it would have been an arbitrary act.*⁹² Evidence that the Amorites had not yet fully embraced idolatry during Abram's days is attested by the Amorite king Melchizedek, whom Scripture describes as "priest to the most high God" (see p. 353). As a priest who still upheld YHWH's values, Melchizedek had the ability to pronounce a blessing on Abram (Gen 14:18–20). YHWH knew that at the end of 430 years (400 years + the fourth generation) the Amorites, as a nation, would be steeped in idolatry, immorality, and other oppressive "ways of life" that called for national judgment.

To what extent had the sins of the Amorites "come to the full" when Israel inherited the land 430 years later? In Leviticus 18, YHWH commanded that Israel should not commit incest (vv.6–18) or adultery (v. 20). In v. 19 he commanded the Israelites to refrain from intercourse during menstruation and stipulated that their children should not be sacrificed to Molech (v. 21). YHWH also forbade homosexuality (v. 22) and bestiality (v. 23). Notice what the Creator states regarding the morality of the Amorites and other nations that Israel was to displace:

Defile not you yourselves in any of these things: *for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof on it, and the land itself vomits out her inhabitants.*
(Lev 18:24–25)

When YHWH "visits iniquity" on a land, it indicates that the sins of that land have "come to a full." If the Amorites and other Canaanite peoples had committed the above trespasses mentioned in Leviticus 18, then they were ripe for judgment 430 years later, when Israel inherited their land.

5. Part IV: The Sign

The Promised-Land Covenant designated Abram's offspring to fulfill YHWH's judgment against Amorite sins by solidifying Israel's inheritance of Shem's double portion of the birthright (i.e., Canaan). This birthright granted Israel the privilege of fulfilling Noah's prophecy against Ham's offspring. Noah's prophecy was part of the reason that YHWH commanded Israel: "When you have passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then you shall *drive out* all the inhabitants of the land from before you" (Num 33:51–52).

Abram had originally asked how he could be assured that YHWH's promises would indeed come true (Gen 15:8). He wanted a tangible sign to seal his covenant with YHWH. The (i) oath that YHWH offered to Abram for the Promised-Land Covenant was "a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" of the divided burnt offering (Gen 15:17). When Judah's elders later made a similar covenant with YHWH (Jer 34:18), the Creator recognized those who "passed between the parts" of the divided sacrifice as being responsible for upholding the stipulations in the covenant, as was customary throughout the ancient world. The Promised-Land Covenant is unique in the fact that YHWH bound himself in this self-imprecating oath to the same fate as the divided sacrifice should he fail to deliver on his promises to Abraham.⁹³ Because YHWH obligated himself to the promises he made to Abraham, he (using a smoking furnace) passed between the pieces of the divided sacrifice, signifying both his commitment to the promises he made with Abram and his acceptance of Abram's previous covenant-offering (when he immigrated to Canaan).⁹⁴ Since YHWH committed himself to uphold his own promises or suffer the fate of the divided sacrifice (if he failed), Abram knew that his God would indeed cause his children to inherit Canaan's land.⁹⁵

What was YHWH's (j) promise to Abram in this covenant?

In the same day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, *To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.* (Gen 15:18–21)

YHWH promised the land of Palestine to Abraham's progeny. Thus Israel's Promised Land spanned from modern Syria to the now-defunct Pelusiac branch of the Nile in Egypt (which included the Sinai Peninsula), granting the nation one of the most favorable trading positions in the ancient world.

Within this covenant's hidden prophecy, YHWH also provided an exact time for Canaan's judgment. How long does a generation exist before another generation begins? Currently, historiographers accept 20–30 years as the average span of a generation.⁹⁶ Does Scripture support its own covenants by demonstrating the fulfillment of this prophecy?

Now the sojourning of the Children of Israel, who dwelled in Egypt, *was four hundred and thirty years*. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, *even the selfsame day it came to pass*, that all the hosts of YHWH went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed to YHWH for bringing them out from the land of Egypt . . . this is that night of YHWH to be observed of all the Children of Israel in their generations. (Exod 12:40–42)

Israel had entered Egypt on the 15th of Abib during Joseph's days and departed on the 15th of Abib 430 years later! The time frame that YHWH stipulated for Israel to dwell in Egypt, in this case, meets the test of fidelity.⁹⁷ Israel's deliverance accomplished YHWH's judgment on the apostacizing nations stipulated in the Promised-Land compact. (We will see more evidence when we look at Israel's exodus in chap. 10.) Through Abram, YHWH would drive out Ham's offspring and supplant them with Shem's progeny as the Amorites and other Canaanite nations' sins reached utter degradation. Thus far, I had seen that Scripture has maintained constancy in written prophecy and doctrine.

After studying these first few covenants, I saw that the Promised-Land Covenant fulfilled YHWH's obligation to bless Abram as promised in the earlier Migration Covenant. Although YHWH established stipulations for inheriting his covenants, he also promised Abram the means to fulfill the inheritance clause in his covenants (i.e., genetic offspring). Abram had accepted the stipulation of waiting on YHWH for a child. I also came to understand that YHWH wanted Abram to understand what would take place while his children waited for the Amorites' sins to degenerate, before he judged Egypt and delivered Israel. Abram needed to understand that his offspring would be afflicted in Egypt for over 400 years. This investigation had not uncovered much of anything that Abram needed to do to fulfill this treaty because he had already complied with YHWH's initial request for migration. The only stipulations that were binding for Abram were the terms of inheritance (i.e., genetic offspring) and the duration of time that Abram's children would have to wait until YHWH fulfilled his covenant to deliver Canaan to them.

Incredibly, I saw that YHWH's part of the covenant bore the greater responsibility. YHWH promised to give Abram his own children and to bless them with fertility. YHWH bore the added responsibilities of bringing Abram's children out of Egypt at the end of 430 years with "great substance," thus enabling them to inherit the Promised Land. YHWH delegated two responsibilities to Abram (stipulation for inheritance and waiting for the land) while placing the greater burden on himself. In contrast to Abram's two stipulations, YHWH bound himself to four stipulations: (1) disallowing adoption as a valid means of inheritance and acknowledging only Abram's physical offspring as rightful heirs of his covenants; (2) granting fertility; (3) bringing Abram's children out of Egypt with great wealth; and (4) causing them to inherit the Promised Land. Even more importantly, YHWH signaled his own fate (self-imprecation) by passing through the sacrifice should he fail to uphold or deliver on his promises to Abram and his descendants (see Table 3.6).⁹⁸

Table 3.6. Promised Land Covenant of Grant (Genesis 15)

<i>Preamble</i>	15:1	YHWH appears to Abram in a vision
	15:1	YHWH is Abram's shield and his great reward
<i>Historical Prologue</i>	15:7	YHWH brought Abram out of Ur
(Issue/Petition)	15:2–3	Abram has no children—YHWH has not fulfilled the Migration Covenant
<i>Stipulation (on Abram)</i>	15:4	Eliezer disqualified to be Abram's son
	15:4	Disallows adoption as legal means of inheriting covenants
	15:4–5	Only Abram's <i>Me'ah</i> (lit., sperm) qualify to inherit Abram's covenants
	15:4–5, 18	Abraham's own offspring will inherit his promises
	15:4–5, 18	Inheritance of covenants based on biological seed
	15:5	Multitude of children
(Prophecy)	15:13	Children will migrate to another land and will be afflicted
	15:16	Wait for Amorites sins to become wholly reprobate
	15:13, 16	Children will return to Canaan 430 yrs. later
Hidden Judgment	15:14	YHWH will judge land to which Abram's children have immigrated
(Blessing for service)	15:14	Israel will leave the oppressor's land with great wealth
	15:16	Fourth generation will still be alive to inherit land
<i>Promise/Blessing</i>	15:5	Offspring as the sand of the seashore
<i>Oath</i>	15:18–21	<i>Shem's birthright</i> : to give Abram's descendants the Promised Land—Euphrates to the eastern (Pelusaic) branch of the Nile
<i>Sign/ratified—YHWH</i>	15:9–11, 17	YHWH's self-imprecating sacrifice
<i>Sign—Abram</i>	15:6	Abram believes

Thus far, the investigation has not revealed any contradictions in the words YHWH spoke to the patriarchs. The doctrine that the birthright (Promised Land) and the blessing (family leadership) would be inherited by Abram and his descendants has been consistent as each covenant has upheld and re-issued the previous promises. With the divergent stances that modern religions take on the inheritance of the Promised Land, I wondered: Would subsequent covenants rescind any of these promises or would YHWH continue upholding the pattern we have seen thus far?

D. Circumcision Covenant

Twenty-four years after YHWH had offered the Promised-Land Covenant to Abram (Gen 17:1, 24) he offered Abram another treaty. This covenant is significantly more specific and

more detailed than the three previous covenants. In Noah's Covenant, YHWH had provided the rainbow as a sign. In the Migration Covenant, Abram signaled his willingness to enter into covenants with YHWH by moving to Canaan. With the Promised-Land Covenant, YHWH had sent a devouring lamp as a sign to seal his compliance to his own promises. He signaled his own fate if he failed to deliver on the promises he had contracted with Abram, thus offering the sincerest of pledges.

Similar to the Migration Covenant, the Circumcision Covenant does not involve sacrifice as part of its seal. In this treaty, both parties contribute signs to signal compliance.

Historical Prologue

YHWH appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am the Almighty God. (Gen 17:1)

Preamble

(a) *Walk before me, and be you perfect.* (Gen 17:1)

Promises

And I will make my covenant between me and you, and (b) *will multiply you exceedingly*. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be a (c) *father of many nations*. Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you. And I will make you (b) exceedingly fruitful, and I will make (c) nations of you, and (d) kings shall come out of you. *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and (e) your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you, and to your seed after you.* And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the (f) land wherein you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and *I will be their God*. And God said to Abraham, You shall keep my covenant therefore, you and your seed after you in their generations. (Gen 17:1–9)

The Seal and Requirement

This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your seed after you; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a *token* of the covenant between me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of your seed. . . . must be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child (g) whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. (Gen 17:10–14)

YHWH's (a) only stipulation for the Circumcision Covenant requires Abram to walk with YHWH *tamiym*.⁹⁹ This is the word that, as we saw above (p. 46), means 'entire, complete, and whole-hearted.' The Hebrew word for "walk," *halak*,¹⁰⁰ means a value or principle-based course of life. The term is quite similar to *derek*, which we have already seen (pp. 16–17) means a 'way' or course of life. This is the same walk (*halak*) or value-based

system to which Scripture records Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Noah (Gen 6:9) as having adhered. Hence, YHWH asks Abram and his children to be whole-hearted and to adhere completely to his principle-based way of life in their relationship with him. Later in the nation's history, King David is said to have walked (*halak*) before YHWH in truth (1 Kgs 3:6), completeness, and integrity of heart (1 Kgs 9:4; Ps 26:1). *Halak* is also used of King Amon (2 Kgs 21:21–22) to describe his adherence to value-based systems *contrary* to the way of YHWH.

As a reward for walking before YHWH wholeheartedly, Abram would gain certain blessings. YHWH reiterates and upholds the promise of (b) fertility.¹⁰¹ As we discussed above, Scripture readily attests to the importance that children play in securing YHWH's blessings. This is emphasized during King David's reign.

And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore¹⁰² and ten thousand men that drew sword. (1 Chr 21:5)

In addition to the joy of family, the blessings of seed indicates military prowess. Abram's descendants would possess military strength that would enable them to defend their country, secure their borders, and establish liberty in the Promised Land.

YHWH augments an additional blessing to his covenant with the promise that Abram's children (c) will become *many nations*. Kings (d) and monarchies will arise in Abram's progeny. YHWH specifically (e) promises to establish his covenant with Abram and his seed in subsequent generations for an everlasting covenant. Thus, YHWH maintains his position and authority as Israel's *only* God. **The wording of this covenant negates any possibility that YHWH could reject the seed of Abraham as inheritors of his covenants and yet be called a God of Truth.** It should be remembered that the definition of truth is:

constancy and freedom from change even during a time of duress as embedded in the concepts of loyalty, fidelity, and faithfulness.¹⁰³

If YHWH is to be a God of truth, then according to the concepts of truth discussed in chap. 1, he cannot recant or rescind his promises and reject Abram's descendants as inheritors of his covenants.¹⁰⁴ That the Creator is consistent and does not rescind his word is evidenced in the next aspect of the Circumcision Covenant wherein YHWH reaffirms (f) the Promised-Land Covenant's pledge, thus maintaining the faithfulness and constancy of his previous word.

The Hebrew word for token, *owth* in verse eleven, means 'a sign.'¹⁰⁵ YHWH provided a sign in his part of this covenant by changing Abram's name from *Abram*, meaning 'high or first father,' to *Abraham*, meaning 'a father of multitudes.'¹⁰⁶ This significant sign reflected the prophetic promise of the Circumcision Covenant itself. Abraham's name became a "seal" or prophecy that ratified the blessing that would arise for his seed. In order for Abram and his seed to enter this pact, they contributed the "sign" of circumcision to ratify their agreement with the contract's terms.

This is the first time that YHWH includes explicit instructions for a covenantee’s sign or seal of compliance. Circumcision, not sacrifice signaled that Abram and his children were complying with the terms of this treaty. YHWH’s only stipulation for Abram was to (a) walk before him wholeheartedly. Circumcision integrated this principle of cutting away the fleshy foreskin with cutting away other obstacles that prevented a whole-hearted walk with YHWH.¹⁰⁷ The Law later incorporated this idea, commanding Israel to “circumcise the foreskin of the heart to be no more stiffnecked” (Deut 10:16; see also Jer 4:4). In the later Moabite-Shechem Covenant (Deuteronomy, see below in this chap.), Moses cited the (e) ultimate fulfillment of this covenant, when “YHWH your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love YHWH your God with all your heart, with all your soul, *that you may live*” (Deut 30:6; see Table 3.7).

Table 3.7. Circumcision Parity Covenant with Abram (Genesis 17)

<i>Preamble or Title</i>	17:1	I am YHWH your God
<i>Historical Prologue</i>	17:2	Walk before me and be perfect (reiterates requirement)
	17:2, 4	Recognizes previous covenants
(Recognizes Previous Promises)	17:2, 4–6	Multiply exceedingly; fruitfulness
	17:8	<i>Abram’s birthright</i> : Promised Land
<i>New Promises</i>	17:6	Abram will be a father of many nations
	17:6	Added blessing of being “exceedingly” fruitful
	17:6	Nations and kings will come from Abram’s seed
	17:7	Covenant given to Abram’s perpetual generations (forever)
	17:7	YHWH will be the only God of Abram’s children (Gen 15:1)
<i>Stipulations</i> (YHWH) (Abram)	17:7	Injunction: YHWH can never reject Abram’s seed
	17:1	Injunction: Observe covenants, walk in the way of YHWH
	17:10, 12–14	Male circumcised on 8 th day after birth
<i>Witnesses</i>	17:3	God and Abraham
<i>Oath</i>	15:9–11, 17	YHWH’s promises—No sacrifice; YHWH had already given a self-imprecating oath. Nothing could be added to that surety.
<i>Blessing for Compliance</i>	17:2, 4, 7	All blessings of the promises in his covenants
<i>Penalty/Curse for Breach</i>	17:14	The offspring that are not circumcised will not be recognized as Abraham’s legitimate heirs or seed. They lose access to covenants/blessings and are severed from Abram’s children
<i>Sign</i>	(YHWH) 17:5	YHWH changes Abram’s name to Abraham
	(Abram) 17:11	Circumcision