

Biblical Passages That Refer to God’s Fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant And a Brief Explanation of Each One

by
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Genesis 1-11 are foundational chapters for understanding the rest of the Bible, both the Hebrew scriptures, i.e., the Old Testament as it is called by Christians, and the Greek scriptures, i.e., the New Testament similarly. In these initial chapters of Genesis are the following accounts and descriptions—

1. of God, who creates the cosmos, bringing it into existence according to His own plans and purposes (Genesis 1);
2. of the first human beings Adam and Eve, who break God’s commandment not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and thereby demonstrate that all human beings, except Jesus the Messiah, will rebel against God. Yet, He will transform those whom He has chosen into immortal and morally perfect beings at the end of the present realm; (Genesis 1-3)
3. of Cain and Abel, brothers of opposite spiritual inclinations, so that Cain becomes envious of his brother’s ability to please to God and murders him, thus revealing the hostility towards truth in all human beings (Genesis 4);
4. of the descendants of Adam and Eve, including Enoch “who walked with God,” leading up to Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Genesis 4-5);
5. of the growth of the inner, moral corruption of mankind (Genesis 4-6);
6. of God’s destruction by a flood of everyone but Noah and his family, whom God rescues by means of the ark and makes a promise with the rainbow not to create universal destruction again (Genesis 6-9);
7. of Noah who blesses Shem and Japheth for treating him respectfully and curses Canaan, the son of Ham who was disrespectful towards him (Genesis 9);
8. of the descendants of Shem, Japheth, and Ham, who all populated the earth after the flood (Genesis 10);
9. of mankind’s arrogance and rebellion towards God as demonstrated by the Tower of Babel, which resulted in God’s confusing their languages and scattering them over the entire earth to curb their pride and arrogance because they thought they were capable of anything (Genesis 11);
10. of Shem’s descendants specifically who culminate in Abraham, to whom God chooses to make the foundational promises which will govern the rest of mankind’s story and will feature Jesus of Nazareth as God’s proxy within the creation for all eternity (Genesis 11).

Nevertheless, we skip Genesis 1-11 and go immediately to Genesis 12:1-9 to start our examination of Old Testament passages which describe God’s two promises to Abraham and the story throughout the rest of history of His fulfilling them. These promises and the role which Jesus of Nazareth plays in their fulfillment are what allow us to make sense of the existence of the cosmos, of human history on the earth, and of the individual lives of all human beings.

Part 1

Genesis-Deuteronomy

THE GREATNESS OF ISRAEL AND THE ETERNAL BLESSING OF ABRAHAM AND OTHERS IN THE WORLD ARE FOUND IN GOD'S PROMISES TO THEM AND THEIR OBEDIENCE OF FAITH TO GOD

Deuteronomy 30:5 “Yahweh your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

30:6 “Moreover Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

Genesis 12:1-9

12:1 Now Yahweh said to Abram,
 “Go forth from your country,
 And from your relatives
 And from your father’s house,
 To the land (אֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים) which I will show you;¹

12:2 And I will make you a great nation (וְאָנֹכִי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל),²

And I will bless you (וְאֶבְרַכְךָ),³
 And make your name great (וְאֶגְדַּלְךָ שְׁמִי);
 And so you shall be a blessing (וְהָיִיתָ בְרָכָה);

12:3 And I will bless those who bless you,
 And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed (וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְךָ כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה).⁴

12:4 So Abram went forth as Yahweh had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

12:5 Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan (אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן).

¹ Verse 1 here in Genesis 12 is the first instance where I include certain Hebrew words to help clarify what the Bible is saying. I have even put some of them in red, because these words are foundational to the Abrahamic Covenant and will appear over and over in the rest of the Old Testament when God makes reference to this covenant, and especially to His constant, loyal, and guaranteed faithfulness to fulfill the covenant. The red word in this verse is אֶרֶץ (ha'aretz), meaning “the land,” which God is giving to Abraham and his descendants, the Jews, as a permanent possession. This is from the word אֶרֶץ ('eretz = land, earth). Genesis 13:31 and verse 5 of Genesis 12 call it the “land of Canaan,” which later will take on the name the “land of Israel” for the first time in 1 Samuel 13:19 “Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, ‘Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears.’”

² The three Hebrew words translated “I will make you a great nation” appear many more times in the Old Testament. These words are וְאָנֹכִי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל (ve'e e'ska, literally “and I will make you” from the verb עָשָׂה ('asah = make, do), and לְגוֹי גָדוֹל (le goy gadol, from the words גוֹי (goy = nation) and גָדוֹל (gadol = great).

³ The important Hebrew word here is וְאֶבְרַכְךָ (va'avareka, literally “I will bless you” from the verb בָּרַךְ (barak = bless).

⁴ There are two important Hebrew phrases in this statement. The first is וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְךָ (ve nivreku veka), and the key word is the first one that contains the verb בָּרַךְ (barak = bless), the same word as in v. 2 when God said to Abraham, “I will bless you.” The second phrase is מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה (mishpachoth ha'adamah) from the two words מִשְׁפָּחָה (mishpachah = family, tribe) and אָדָמָה ('adamah = ground, earth).

12:6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.

12:7 Yahweh appeared (וַיִּרְאֵהוּ) to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land (לְיָרְשָׁךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת).” So he built an altar there to Yahweh who had appeared (וַיִּבְרָאֵהוּ) to him.⁵

12:8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to Yahweh and called upon the name of Yahweh.

12:9 Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

It is about 2000 B.C., and God appears to Abraham, who through this interaction becomes the first Jew, the patriarch (literally “ruler of the family” from the Greek *patria* = family and *archays* = ruler, beginning) of the Jews and of the nation of Israel. I will always use the name Abraham even though it will not be until Genesis 17:5 that God will change his name from Abram, which means exalted father, to Abraham, meaning the father of a multitude.

The first three verses of Genesis 12:1-9 briefly describe the two main points of a covenant (a contractual agreement) between God and Abraham. The first main point of the covenant is that God promises to Abraham that He will give him and his physical descendants, the Jews, the land of Canaan (which will eventually be called the land of Israel) and that He will make these descendants the greatest nation in human history (a promise which He has not yet fulfilled). The second main point is that God promises to grant the blessing of eternal life to Abraham and all other sinful human beings who adopt the same kind of belief in God as Abraham.

This passage begins with God’s commanding Abraham to leave his native country and his immediate relatives and move to another country, i.e., to a “land which [God] will show [him].” We find out from the end of the previous chapter in Genesis that Abraham’s father, Terah, began the journey with him, along with Abraham’s wife Sarah (whose name God changes in Genesis 17:15 from Sarai, whose meaning is unknown, to Sarah, which means princess) and his nephew Lot. And we also learn that Abraham’s original country was Ur of the Chaldees, i.e., southern Iraq—

Genesis 11:31 Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans [in southern Iraq just north of the Persian Gulf] in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran [north of the land of Canaan, in modern Iraq], and settled there. **32** The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

The word “show” in v. 1 literally means that God will cause Abraham to see the land where he is going. But it means more than reveal the land or present it in such a way that Abraham will be able to observe it with his own eyes. We find out from v. 7 that the full meaning is that God will give it to Abraham and his descendants, the Jews, so that they will possess the land that we now know as Israel. This is the first part of the first promise of this covenant. We also find out from the rest of the Old Testament that eventually the Jews will possess this land and live on it in complete security and safety without any threat of being harmed by their neighbors or the rest of the world.

Then in v. 2 God tells Abraham that He “will make [him] a great nation.” Again, we find out from the rest of the Old Testament that God means that He will lift this man and his physical descendants, the Jews, out of relative obscurity and weakness into enormous fame and strength that no other empire, nation, country, or group of people experiences in human history. This is the second part of the first promise of the covenant. But an important *implied* feature of these descendants that is worth mentioning now and that is incorporated in the upcoming second main point and promise is that eventually all living Jews will exercise the same authentic belief as their father Abraham. In other words, the “great nation” which God will bring about far into Abraham’s future will be made up of

⁵ In v. 7, God declares that He will give (נָתַן, *’ettayn*, literally “I will give” from the verb נָתַן (*nathan* = give)) the land to Abraham’s descendants (לְיָרְשָׁךָ, *le zar’aka*, literally “to your seed/descendants), from the noun זֶרַע (*zera* = seed, descendants).

Jews of genuine belief and obedience to God. Indeed, they will be Christians and followers of Jesus as their King and Messiah. This is the theological framework of the Jewish people which both the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament instruct us to build.

The passage continues in v. 2 with God's saying that He will "bless" Abraham. It is not obvious here what God means, but the Bible reveals later that He will grant this sinful man eternal forgiveness and life, which is the first part of the second main point and promise. God goes on to say in this verse that He will "make [Abraham's] name great" with the result that he will "be a blessing" to other people. As with the word "blessing," we find out from the rest of the Bible that God means that anyone else in human history who is willing to recognize and embrace the importance of Abraham's role both as the patriarch of his descendants, the Jews, and as a genuine believer in the one, true God will acquire the same gift of eternal forgiveness and life as Abraham. And in verse 3 God spells this out more explicitly when He says, "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." We do see an additional element in this statement, that those who reject Abraham's important role and are unwilling to emulate his genuine faith in God will incur God's condemnation. And the Bible makes it clear that the penalty that accompanies God's condemnation is eternal destruction. For example, the apostle Paul speaks of what God will do to these people when Jesus the Messiah returns—

2 Thessalonians 1:8 [He will deal] out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. **9** These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, **10** when he comes to be glorified in his saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.

Eternal life or eternal destruction for those who either embrace or reject the importance of Abraham's faith in God respectively are the second part of the second promise and main point of the covenant. God is promising that the eternal destiny of all other human beings in history boils down to their attitude towards Abraham, the first believing Jew. If someone understands and believes that God chose Abraham as a model of belief and the father of the ethnic group who will become the greatest nation in human history, then God will grant this person the same blessing as Abraham—eternal forgiveness and life. And anyone who does not believe this, even if they might understand it, will receive God's eternal condemnation and destruction—regardless of the person's ethnic origin. This is to say that Abraham-like belief in God on the part of a Jew will result in eternal life, and the same Abraham-like belief in God by a Gentile will result in the same.⁶

In verses 4-9 of this passage, we find out that Abraham obeys God and "set out for the land of Canaan," and he eventually comes into this land, which is inhabited by a group of people called the "Canaanites." His wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, along with other "persons whom they had acquired in Haran," a city in northern Syria, accompany him. Then God clarifies what He means in v. 1 to the effect that He will "show" this land to Abraham. He means that He will "give" it to him and to his descendants, whom we now know as the Jews. But the land is not vacant. It is inhabited by the Canaanites, who remain on the land for the duration of Abraham's life as recorded in Genesis 13-25. Consequently, Abraham never settles in one place for long, demonstrated by this early period of vs. 4-9 of his coming into the land. He arrives first at Shechem, moves on to near Bethel, and then journeys toward the southern part of the land, the Negev. But we can imagine that he is constantly thinking about God's promise to him that this land will eventually belong to his descendants and him, while he is currently homeless and a nomad on the land of his own possession and awaits the arrival of a son who will be his first descendant. Plus, as he reflects on the other promise of being blessed with eternal life, he is probably pondering not only exactly what this will look like, but also how it will happen that "in [him] all the families of the earth will be blessed?" How will the message of God and his faith

⁶ We will look more closely at the definition of a Jew and of a Gentile in a later passage.

in Him get out from this land and be disseminated so that people in the rest of the world acquire eternal life like him?

Abraham would have to read the remainder of the Old Testament, which will further clarify and expand the description of the first main point of God's making his descendants, the Jews, a "great nation." And he would have to encounter Jesus and read the New Testament, which will do the same concerning the second main point of God's granting the blessing of eternal life to all sinners of authentic faith, while the New Testament will also refer in less detail than the Old Testament to the first main point. This is to say that Genesis 12:1-9 (and vs. 1-3 especially) is foundational for understanding the rest of the Bible. Nevertheless, we will find that, even though Abraham's understanding of all that is involved in God's fulfilling this covenant to him is quite limited, he still will participate in its fulfillment because of his authentic belief and obedience of God.

Genesis 13

13:1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him.

13:2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold.

13:3 He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,

13:4 to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of Yahweh.

13:5 Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.

13:6 And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together.

13:7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.

13:8 So Abram said to Lot,

"Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers.

13:9 "Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left."

13:10 Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere — this was before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah — like the garden of Yahweh, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar.

13:11 So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other.

13:12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan (יָשַׁב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן), while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom.

13:13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against Yahweh.

13:14 Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him,

"Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward;

13:15 for all the land (אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ) which you see, I will give it to you (לְךָ אֶת־הַנְּגִידָה) and to your descendants forever (וְלִבְנֵי־עַד־עוֹלָם).⁷

13:16 "I will make your descendants (אֶת־יְרֵעֶךָ) as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants (גַּם־יְרֵעֶךָ) can also be numbered.

13:17 "Arise, walk about the land (בְּאֶרֶץ) through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you (כִּי־לְךָ אֶת־הַנְּגִידָה)."

⁷ עַד־עוֹלָם ('ad 'olam = into perpetuity, i.e., for as long as God wants) found here for the first time in Genesis 13, but it will appear 45 more times in the Old Testament, while the single word עוֹלָם ('olam) which gets translated forever or everlasting or permanent is used 152 times.

13:18 Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to Yahweh.

In this next chapter of Genesis, we find out that Abraham and his entourage had ended up in Egypt. This was due to a famine in the land of Canaan as explained in Genesis 12:12-20. Returning from Egypt to this land, he settles near Bethel again and continues to “[call] on the name of Yahweh,” meaning that he is still believing Him and obeying Him as he had when he left his homeland and traveled to Canaan. However, there is a problem. His nephew Lot is wealthy and, like him, owns many cattle, so that their “herdsmen” start fighting over the available grazing land. Abraham, the wise and gracious uncle, suggests to Lot that they separate, and he kindly gives his nephew the right to choose which part of the land he prefers. Lot selects the Jordan Valley to the east and moves his family’s tents to the city of Sodom. The author of Genesis makes an editorial comment regarding this choice, that “the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinners against Yahweh,” a portent of things to come in Genesis 19 when God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham, now alone with his family and household, settles “in the land of Canaan,” between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, and God further clarifies to him the first promise of His covenant. He says, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:14,15; cf. v. 17). In spite of other nations currently living on the land, God promises to give it to Abraham’s descendants *forever*. The Hebrew phrase עַד-עוֹלָם (‘*ad ‘olam*), that is translated “forever,” means “into perpetuity,” which is to say, for as long as God wants something to exist. And in this case, it is the Jews’ possessing the land of Canaan. Therefore, God is not making a promise to them that the land will be theirs *eternally*. Instead, the rest of the Bible indicates that God will give them the land for as long as He wants, which will be until the end of the present realm when God will destroy this cosmos and bring a new one into existence as described by Revelation 21.

God further clarifies His first promise in Genesis 12 to make Abraham’s descendants a great nation. He goes on to say to him in v. 16 here, “I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.” The story of Abraham’s rescuing Lot from kidnappers in Genesis 14 informs us that currently his whole household, which does not yet include an actual *physical* descendant, is only a few hundred souls. But here at the end of Genesis 13 God tells him that eventually his descendants will number in the millions. My guess is that God is not referring to the total number of Jews throughout all history, but instead to those who will comprise the “great nation” that will last for many generations and that is still future to us. In other words, the promise for the Jews to possess the land of Canaan (Israel) includes the promise for them to live on for many, many generations.

Chapter 13 ends with another indication of Abraham’s nomadic condition as he moves once again from the southern part of the land, the Negev, north to the city of Hebron, which exists today four thousand years after Abraham and is approximately twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem.

Genesis 15

15:1 After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying,
 “Do not fear, Abram,
 I am a shield to you;
 Your reward shall be very great (שְׂכָרְךָ תִּרְבֶּה מְאֹד).”

15:2 Abram said, “Adonai Yahweh, what will You give me (מַה-תִּתֶּן-לִי), since I am childless, and the heir of my house (וְיֶדֶן מִנְשֵׁךְ בֵּיתִי) is Eliezer of Damascus?”

15:3 And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me (הָיָה לִי לֹא נִתְּתָה זָרַע), one born in my house is my heir (בְּדָבְרֵי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי).”⁸

15:4 Then behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir (יִירָשְׁךָ); but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir (יִירָשְׁךָ).”

15:5 And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be (כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֶךָ).”

15:6 Then he believed in Yahweh; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

15:7 And He said to him, “I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it (לָקַחְתָּ לְךָ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ).”

15:8 He said, “Adonai Yahweh, how may I know that I will possess it (אֵיךְ יִשְׁנָה)?”

15:9 So He said to him, “Bring Me (קָחָה לִי) a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

15:10 Then he brought (וַיִּקְחֵהוּ לְךָ) all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds.

15:11 The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

15:12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.

15:13 God said to Abram,

“Know for certain that your descendants (זַרְעֶךָ) will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

15:14 “But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

15:15 “As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace (בְּשָׁלוֹם); you will be buried at a good old age.

15:16 “Then in the fourth generation they will return here (וַיָּשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה), for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

15:17 It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.

15:18 On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram (כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת-אַבְרָם בְּרִית), saying,⁹

“To your descendants I have given this land (לְזַרְעֶךָ נָתַתִּי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת),

From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

15:19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite

15:20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim

15:21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”

We skip ahead to chapter 15, which is very important for understanding the nature of the covenant that God is making with Abraham. In v. 1, God tells Abraham that there is nothing to fear in regard to the promises which He has made him, both in regard to his descendants becoming the greatest nation in human history and in regard to his acquiring eternal life. Indeed, God’s fulfillment of these promises will be Abraham’s “very great reward.” But in vs. 2 & 3, Abraham is not so sure and points out that God has not given him an actual child, resulting in his servant inheriting his possessions (literally that he is “the one who takes possession of me”) and God’s promise of being the great nation. In vs. 4 & 5, God responds, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He takes him outside his tent and shows him the night sky, saying, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Just as in chapter 13 God had said that Abraham’s physical descendants, the Jews, would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. Now He

⁸ The Hebrew word יוֹרֵשׁ (*yoresh* = the one who possess) is key because of its reference to the person who inherits Abraham’s property and the promises which God has made to him.

⁹ The Hebrew word כָּרַת (*carath* = cut) and the word בְּרִית (*bereeth* = covenant) are obviously key throughout the Old Testament as that which God does with Abraham and then with the Israelites for example at Mt. Sinai. He cuts a covenant with them where He has certain obligations and the people have their own moral obligations to keep the covenant.

switches metaphors and assures him that the quantity of them will be like the stars in the heavens. Again, this will be during the time of the “great nation” that will endure for many generations.

The author next reports that Abraham believes this promise, and God “reckoned it to him as righteousness” as the NAS95 translates v. 6. This is the famous statement which the apostle Paul uses in Romans and Galatians to argue that Abraham had at some point in his life entered into a status before God whereby he stood to acquire eternal life *without being circumcised and without obeying the Mosaic Covenant*. This requires a much longer explanation than I will provide, but it means that God miraculously changes the inner spiritual orientation of sinful humans, resulting in their choosing to believe God for His truth and pursuing obedience to Him even in their continued sinful condition. And the eventual outcome of this change is life in the eternal Kingdom of God.

God then repeats in v. 7 the other part of the first promise to Abraham, that, having brought him out of “Ur of the Chaldees” (southern Iraq), He will give him “this land to possess it.” It is striking, however, that, in v. 8 and in spite of his previous belief in God in v. 6 for a multitude of descendants within the “great nation,” Abraham questions Him as to how he “may know that [he] will possess” the land. I think that we can account for this sudden change in Abraham by concluding that this next scene takes place a little later in his life where he experiences a moment of doubt in God’s promises, just as all sinful believers do. However, I suggest that this is not sin. It is only a natural and typical human experience of reflecting on life and wondering if God really is going to follow through on His promises to us. And Abraham is fortunate in that when he asks God directly, He responds in v. 9 by instructing him to partake in an Ancient Near Eastern covenant ceremony with Him. When two ancient tribes made an international treaty with one another, they would slice a least one animal (such as a cow) in half, lay the halves on the ground with space in between, separate the tribes with each one sitting opposite the other to the side of one of the animal halves, and then their respective chiefs or rulers would walk shoulder to shoulder between the two halves, thus signaling that so may it happen to them, that they be put to death by being sliced in half, if their tribe violates the requirements of the treaty.

In verses 10 and 11, Abraham likewise prepares the animals which God is requiring for this ceremony. But we notice a radical difference in v. 12, that he falls asleep on the ground off to the side. In addition, Abraham experiences “terror and great darkness.” The Greek translation of the Old Testament identifies this as a “great dark fear.” What is happening to Abraham? I think that God is making him aware in his sleep of the profundity of what is transpiring, that if it were not for His undeserved grace and mercy, Abraham, like any sinner, would eventually be condemned and destroyed eternally by God. This obviously implies that Abraham in no way deserves the wonderful promises which God has made to him—and neither do we their fulfillment which involves us!

But look what happens in v. 17—“a smoking oven and a flaming torch...passed between these pieces” of the animals. I think that these two objects represent God, the transcendent creator and author of all reality. Therefore, He is the only one of the two “chiefs,” God and Abraham, who passes between the animal halves. And the meaning of this is that God is declaring that He alone has the responsibility to make sure that His covenant with Abraham and his descendants is kept. While it is necessary that Abraham and future Jews fulfill the condition which God is placing on them—to believe Him and pursue obedience to Him from changed hearts, as Abraham has already demonstrated in v. 6, “And he believed in Yahweh, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness”—God is taking responsibility for making sure that they meet His condition and for making sure that He fulfills all His promises to Abraham that He made in Genesis 12:1-9 and continues to clarify in later chapters.

Indeed, Abraham and his physical descendants must *believe* God for all that He says. This means that this covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, is conditional. It is conditioned on sinful human beings’ believing and obeying God. However, the covenant is not contingent, by which I mean that Abraham and the Jews are not *ultimately* responsible for making sure that either they or God keep the covenant. They are not ultimately responsible for ensuring that they fulfill the condition which God has placed upon them. This sounds weird to us human beings who typically consider ourselves completely free

of God. But I think that the Bible makes it clear (even if it is difficult for us to grasp intellectually) that both parties (God and man) keeping the covenant is not *ultimately dependent on the human beings* who are the other “tribe” besides God in the making of this covenant. Certainly, Abraham and his descendants *must* meet the condition of believing God for His promises, but, because only God walks (so to speak) between the halves of the animals, He is also the only one who will ensure that both He and the people with whom He is making this covenant keep it. Indeed, God is symbolically declaring that He **guarantees** that both He and the Jews will meet the conditions which He is placing on the two of them. God will fulfill His condition of remaining faithful to the Jews—in spite of any disobedience and hardness of heart that they display. And God will make sure that the Jews eventually fulfill their condition of believing and obeying Him. Theologically this means that God will *cause* the Jews to believe Him (by changing their inner spiritual orientation as mentioned above).

It will be vitally important to remember this fact as we read the rest of the Bible, because no matter how disobedient and immoral the Jews become, God never completely abandons them. Let me repeat this because many Christians have concluded that God has transferred to the Church, the collection of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus, His promise to the Jews. But I think that there is too much evidence in the rest of the Bible to think this of God. Therefore, I suggest that God has promised to transform the Jews into the greatest and most powerful nation in all human history, and this promise *never* becomes null and void. It is tempting to read the Old Testament stories of the Jews and their persistent rebellion of God along with His disciplining them by bringing foreign nations against them and expelling them from the land of promise and carting them off into exile, and then combine this with the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as the Messiah in the New Testament as a clear (?) indication that God has abandoned the Jews and forsaken His promise to them so as to transfer it onto the Christian Church that is comprised mainly of Gentiles who will acquire the “new” land of heaven. But, if I am right about God’s guaranteeing His promise to Abraham and the Jews through this covenantal ceremony, then we make Him a liar by changing what God is saying in Genesis. And I am extremely reluctant to go this direction—without somebody coming up with an airtight argument, which I have not yet seen anybody do. Plus, we risk misunderstanding all that God is doing in the rest of human history. We even risk encouraging anti-Semitism by believing that the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people as an ethnic group. But I am suggesting that God has not shifted His first promise from the Jews to the Christian Church, and we are still waiting for Him to turn them into a “great nation” on “the land of Canaan/Israel.” We are also still waiting for God to grant eternal life as His second promise to both believing Jews and believing Gentiles after He fulfills His first promise.

In the midst of this ceremony God also declares in vs. 13-16 to the sleeping Abraham that his descendants will spend a considerable time (“four hundred years”) in a different land (Egypt as we find out later). They will be enslaved by the people in this land, but then God will rescue, implying that they will return to the land which God is giving them. In addition Abraham will live a long life on the land of Canaan and then die. But because he will die “in peace,” literally “in shalom,” thus “going to his fathers,” he will join his deceased ancestors, some of whom must have also been authentic believers in God, who before they died likewise looked forward to the eternal shalom which God has promised Abraham.

At the end of this chapter in vs. 18-21, the author states explicitly that God “made a covenant” with Abraham. The Hebrew reads, “Yahweh cut with Abraham a covenant,” a reference to the Ancient Near Eastern practice of cutting animals in half and laying them on the ground as a promenade for the chiefs of the two tribes to use to symbolize their commitment to keeping the covenant.

Then God once again speaks to Abraham in the midst of this covenant ceremony to the effect that He “has given this land to his descendants.” And He delineates its borders, “From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates,” where these particular people currently live, “the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite, and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim, and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.” Certainly this explicit description of the geographical location and extension of the land which God is giving to Abraham’s descendants,

the Jews, further confirms that He is dead serious (no pun intended) about fulfilling His promise to them, and someday they will live on this land as the greatest nation in all human history.

Genesis 17:1-22

- 17:1** Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared (וַיֵּלֶא) to Abram and said to him,
 “I am God Almighty (אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם);
 Walk before Me, and be blameless.
- 17:2** “I will make [give] My covenant between Me and you (וַיַּחַדְתִּי בְרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ),
 And I will multiply you exceedingly (וַיַּרְבֶּה אֹתְךָ בְּמְאֹד מְאֹד).”¹⁰
- 17:3** Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying,
17:4 “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you (בְּרִיתִי אִתְּךָ),
 And you will be the father of a multitude of nations (לְאֹבֶד הַמְּנוֹן גּוֹיִם).
- 17:5** “No longer shall your name be called Abram (אַבְרָם),
 But your name shall be Abraham (אַבְרָהָם);
 For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations (לְאֹבֶד הַמְּנוֹן גּוֹיִם).
- 17:6** “I will make you exceedingly fruitful (וַיַּרְבֶּה אֹתְךָ בְּמְאֹד מְאֹד),
 and I will make [give] nations of you (וַיַּחַדְתִּי לְגוֹיִם),
 and kings will come forth from you (וּמְלָכִים מִמֶּנִּי יֵצְאוּ).”¹¹
- 17:7** “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you
 throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant
 (וַיִּסְמְנֵנִי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זַרְעֶךָ אֶתְּנֵנִי לְדֹרֹתֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם),
 to be God to you and to your descendants after you (לְהִיוֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים וּלְיִרְעֶךָ אֶתְּנֵנִי).
- 17:8** “I will give (וְנָתַתִּי) to you and to your descendants after you (לְךָ וּלְיִרְעֶךָ אֶתְּנֵנִי)
 the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan (כָּל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן),
 for an everlasting possession (לְאֶחְזָת עוֹלָם); and I will be their God (וְהָיִיתִי לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם).”
- 17:9** God said further to Abraham,
 “Now as for you, you shall keep (תִּשְׁמֹר) My covenant,¹³
 you and your descendants after you throughout their generations (לְדֹרֹתֶם).
- 17:10** “This is My covenant, which you shall keep (תִּשְׁמֹרוּ),
 between Me and you and your descendants after you:
 every male among you shall be circumcised.
- 17:11** “And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin,
 and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.
- 17:12** “And every male among you who is eight days old
 shall be circumcised throughout your generations,
 a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner,
 who is not of your descendants.
- 17:13** “A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money

¹⁰ The Hebrew word וַיַּרְבֶּה (ve 'arbeh = and I will multiply), something which God is promising to do for Abraham to make him a great nation, i.e., make his very populous for many generations.

¹¹ Three options for what God means by Abraham's being a father of a multitude of nations – 1) the ancestor of a large group of people who will become the great nation of promise (cf. Genesis 12:1&2); 2) the ancestor of many different nations as a result of both his acquiring a son, Ishmael, through Sarah's handmaiden in Genesis 16 (cf. Genesis 17:20 & 21:18) and his taking another wife, Keturah, after Sarah's death (cf. Genesis 25:1-4); 3) the spiritual father of many believers from many different ethnic groups throughout history. Because of God's saying also that “kings will come forth from” Abraham in v. 6, I think that #2 is likely, but the whole context leads me more towards #1.

¹² The first Hebrew word וַיִּסְמְנֵנִי (va haqimotee) = and I will establish) comes from קוּם (qum = establish) as is used often in the Old Testament to God's making a solid covenant with the Jewish people. The second Hebrew word לְדֹרֹתֶם (le dorotham = to your generations), refers to future Jews who will eventually inherit the fulfillment of God's promises.

¹³ The Hebrew word תִּשְׁמֹר (tishmor = you shall guard, keep) refers to the kind of priority that any human should give to the moral commandments of God.

shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant (לְבְרִית עוֹלָם).

17:14 “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken (הִפְרָה) My covenant.”

17:15 Then God said to Abraham,

“As for Sarai (שָׂרַי) your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah (שָׂרָה) shall be her name.

17:16 “I will bless her (וַיְבָרֶכְתִּי אֹתָהּ), and indeed I will give you a son by her (וְנָתַתִּי מִמֶּנָּה לְךָ בֵּן). Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations (לְגוֹיִם); kings of peoples will come from her (מִלְכֵי עַמִּים מִמֶּנָּה יֵהְיוּ).”

17:17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed (וַיִּצְחַק), and said in his heart,

“Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

17:18 And Abraham said to God,

“Oh that Ishmael might live before You (וַיִּתְּנָה לְפָנֶיךָ)!”

17:19 But God said,

“No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac (יִצְחָק); and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him (וַיִּסְמְנֵנִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לְוָרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו).

17:20 “As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him (וַיְבָרֶכְתִּי אֹתוֹ), and will make him fruitful (וַיַּרְבֵּה אֹתוֹ) and will multiply him exceedingly (וַיַּרְבֵּה אֹתוֹ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד). He shall become the father of twelve princes (שְׁנָיִם־עָשָׂר נְשִׂאִים יוֹלִיד), and I will make him a great nation (וַיַּגְדִּילֵנִי גְדוֹל).

17:21 “But My covenant I will establish with Isaac (וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֶקְיָם אֶת־יִצְחָק), whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.”

17:22 When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

It has been approximately twenty-four years since Abraham arrived in the land of Canaan, and v. 1 of chapter 17 tells us that he is ninety-nine years old when God appears to him again, and a lengthy conversation between the two ensues. God identifies Himself as “El Shaddai,” meaning God Almighty, the most powerful person in existence who has complete and uncontested authority over Abraham and the rest of created reality. God then commands Abraham to live his life before Him, and, therefore, in acknowledgement of no other god—because no other gods actually exist. He also commands him to be “blameless,” which is not referring to moral perfection, but to Abraham’s having a standing before God of not being eternally blamed and condemned for his sin because he has fulfilled the necessary condition of believing God for all the truth that He is relating to Him, and he is willing to obey anything He commands him. Abraham has already demonstrated this in Genesis 15:6, “And he believed in Yahweh, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness,” but God now exhorts him to keep going, never to stop believing Him for the two promises which He has made to him of the future greatness of the Jews and eternal life for him and those who imitate his faith.

In v. 2, God says that He will give His covenant that is between Abraham and Him. In addition, He will cause Abraham to become a group of many people. Then, in v.3, Abraham pays homage to God by falling on his face, and God continues speaking to him in v. 4, that His covenant of the promises of Genesis 12 is specifically with Abraham and with no one else. Abraham is unique in all human history in this regard. And God adds that Abraham will be the “father of a multitude of nations,” which is to say the patriarch of a large group of people. And in this context, this group will eventually become the great nation of Genesis 12:2.

Because Abraham will be this kind of ancestor, God then in v. 5 changes his name from Abram, meaning exalted father, to Abraham, which means the father of a multitude. God states His plan in v. 6 to make Abraham’s people very large and that He will literally give him for the purpose of there being nations such these nations will also include kings who rule over them. In the context of Genesis

12-25, I think that these nations and kings refer to the several tribes of Israel who will come into existence three generations after Abraham. He will have a son, Isaac, who will have a son, Jacob, and Jacob will have twelve sons who become the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. These will become the “nations,” or better translated the “peoples” of Abraham, his physical descendants who are his peoples and who will eventually constitute the great nation of the promise. Several generations later, God will institute a monarchy among the Jews through David, the first king of this dynasty, with many kings after him and culminating in Jesus as the final and eternal king.¹⁴

In v. 7, God reiterates that He is making this covenant with Abraham and his descendants “throughout [their] generations for an everlasting covenant.” But He is referring to the first promise of Genesis 12:1-3, that the Jews as Abraham’s “descendants” will become a great nation. Therefore, this covenant is “everlasting” not in the sense that it is eternal, but in the sense that God will sustain the Jews on the land of Israel as they rule over the earth with their Messiah, Jesus, until He is ready to destroy the present realm and create an eternal one as described in Revelation 21. God includes in this verse that He will be the God of the Jews, beginning with Abraham. They are His chosen people as a unique ethnic group within human history. Other *individuals*, i.e., Gentiles who cannot trace their ancestry back to Abraham through Jacob and Isaac, will be able to claim that God is their God. But only the *nation* of Israel can say that He is the God of their entire ethnic group, which He will demonstrate when He changes the inward spiritual condition of every living Jew and makes them the “great nation” of promise while they live on the land of Israel.

Then God repeats in v. 8 that He is giving him the land of Canaan where Abraham is spending the rest of this life, even though the Canaanites, who are a Gentile people, never relinquish possession of their space on this land. Thus, this is the “land of [Abraham’s] sojournings,” i.e., temporary settlements in various places on the land during his life. But eventually the land will become the “everlasting possession” of the Jews. They will live securely and safely on it as *their* land until God decides to create an eternal heavens and earth (cf. Revelation 21). And God states that it will be during the time of their fully possessing the land that He (and He alone) “will be their God.” Their worship of other gods or atheism, which will characterize their history for so long, will vanish, and they will all with a unity of mind and heart worship only God—through their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

God continues discussing this first promise of the covenant He is making with Abraham and tells him in vs. 9-14 that it is conditioned on all the males of Israel being circumcised, starting with Abraham. This becomes part of the way that the Jews will “keep” God’s covenant, the Hebrew word meaning to guard and protect. And God is speaking of their hearts and minds, that they learn what He wants them to do and guards within them His requirements with every fiber of their being. He also calls this the “sign” of His covenant, the obvious outward way “in [their] flesh” to tell if they, Abraham’s descendants, are truly interested in His being their God and their being His people. But God also places this requirement on any male who is not one of his physical descendants and, instead, has become a servant (worker) of his, even those who are closely attached to his household and who are joining him in worshiping Yahweh. And this sign is so important that any male of his descendants or household who is not circumcised on the eighth day of his life will be considered an outcast from God’s people, someone who is not keeping His covenant and who will not receive the fulfillment of His promise for the Jews to become a great nation. And if this person lacks authentic faith, then he will lose out on eternal life also.

Next in verses 15 & 16, God changes the name of Abraham’s wife. She was Sarai and now is Sarah, which means princess. And the reason for her new name is that, just as God told Abraham in vs. 6, He will first “bless” her with a son for Abraham, the first of his descendants, and then he will “bless” her by making her the “mother of nations,” and “kings of peoples will come from her.” Here is another reference to the multitude of physical descendants who will comprise the Jews, i.e., the

¹⁴ The first actual king of the Jews is Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. But God chooses David next from the tribe of Judah and covenants with him to build a dynasty who rule over the Jews.

twelve tribes and “peoples” of both Abraham and Sarah, who will become a true kingdom with their own human monarch ruling over them.

In vs. 17 & 18, Abraham displays his doubt about such a prediction by God in the light of his old age by laughing and asking, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” As a result, Abraham requests that Ishmael, a child whom he fathered through Sarah’s Egyptian handmaiden in Genesis 16, be the heir of God’s promise to him. However, God’s plans include the miracle of this elderly couple conceiving and having a son, which He relates to Abraham in v. 19. And most likely because Abraham laughed, God instructs him to name Sarah’s child Isaac, meaning “he laughs.” Whenever he calls his son by name, he will remind himself that he doubted God who nevertheless fulfilled His promise, an ironic way to point Abraham throughout the rest of his life to the one and only God who deserves his worship.

God also goes on to state that Ishmael, too, will become a great nation. But God makes it clear that his status as a great nation will not be that of Abraham and Isaac, because it will be only with Isaac that He will “establish” His covenant. It will not be with Ishmael. In other words, Isaac is Abraham’s unique son. Only his physical descendants (and then later the descendants of Jacob), not Ishmael’s, will eventually become the great nation of the promise of Genesis 12:2, living securely and safely on the land of Canaan (Israel). Everyone else, even they are related to Abraham, are Gentiles. In addition, God says that Isaac will arrive as Sarah’s son the next year. So Abraham does not have long to wait for the next step in God’s fulfilling the first promise.

Genesis 18:16-19

18:16 Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off.

18:17 Yahweh said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

18:18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation (הֲיִינוּ יְהוּדָה לְנוֹי גְדוֹל וְעָצוּם) and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed (וְיִבְרָכּוּ בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ)?

18:19 “For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him (וְיִשְׁמְרוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ יְהוָה) ¹⁵ (לְמַעַן) אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת־בְּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אֲחֵלָיו) to keep the way of Yahweh (יְהוָה) by doing righteousness and justice (לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט), so that Yahweh may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him (לְמַעַן הֵבִיא יְהוָה עַל־אַבְרָהָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עָלָיו).”

Three men, one of whom is a theophany, a created manifestation of the transcendent God Himself, Yahweh, have visited Abraham at the beginning of Genesis 18. In the above passage, he is saying goodbye to them, and God asks Himself if He should reveal to Abraham that He is going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the egregious evil being done in these cities. The reason God gives for not hiding this information from Abraham is that He has made wonderful promises to him, which we looked at first in Genesis 12:1-9 and have been confirmed in later passages.

Here in v. 18, God repeats these two promises—that Abraham’s descendants will eventually become the most powerful and prosperous nation of authentic believers in all human history, and that all other ethnic groups will contain some believers in God like Abraham who will acquire the blessing of eternal life that He is likewise granting to him.

God goes on in v. 19 to provide the reason why He will bless Abraham and other believers in this way. It is because He has chosen (literally “known”) him. And His purpose for choosing him is so that Abraham may pass on to the next generation, who will have the responsibility to pass on to future generations similarly, that God requires of them that they guard His covenant and the instructions that He provides them for how to live their lives. In approximately five hundred years, the Mosaic Covenant of Exodus-Deuteronomy will contain all the instructions which God wants them to obey. These will inform

¹⁵ The Hebrew word לְמַעַן (*le ma'an* = in order that) shows purpose or result.

the Jews as to how God wants them to “do righteousness and justice.” Then God repeats that this is the condition which he is placing on the people of Israel in order for Him to fulfill His promise to “bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him,” i.e., to mold his descendants into the most prominent and powerful nation in history. Again, we acknowledge that the doing of “righteousness and justice” by the Jews (or by any sinful human being) includes having a heart which has been changed by God and results in genuine faith in Him.

Genesis 21:1-13

- 21:1 Then Yahweh took note of Sarah as He had said, and Yahweh did for Sarah as He had promised.
- 21:2 So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.
- 21:3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.
- 21:4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.
- 21:5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.
- 21:6 Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.”
- 21:7 And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”
- 21:8 The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.
- 21:9 Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking.
- 21:10 Therefore she said to Abraham, “Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.”
- 21:11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son.
- 21:12 But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named.
- 21:13 “And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant.”

In Genesis 17 and 18, God tells Abraham that the following year Sarah will bear him a son, and he must name him Isaac (יצחק, *yitzhak*), meaning “laughter,” because both Abraham and Sarah respectively laugh at the whole idea of a husband and wife their age conceiving and having a child. Abraham will be one hundred years old, and Sarah is not too far behind, so that both are easily past the age of *naturally* having children. But God is the God of miracles, and in Genesis 21:1-2 above, God miraculously (yet through the natural manner of a man causing a woman to become pregnant) fulfills His promise to them, so that “Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.” In v. 3, they name him Isaac as stipulated by God. Every time they call their son by name, it will remind them that they had doubted God and considered it a joke that He could provide them with such a wonderful gift in their old age. In accordance with God’s instructions in Genesis 17 and in order to fulfill the *Jewish* condition of the Abrahamic Covenant, the parents circumcise Isaac when he is eight days old.

In v. 6, Sarah acknowledges God’s gift of not only a son but also that He is the reason for her to laugh in her old age. She asks rhetorically in v. 7 who could have even imagined that she would nurse a child long past the time of her body’s naturally being capable of giving birth to this son? Thus, the joy and pleasure of raising a son is now hers, and she looks forward to sharing her laughter with all her friends. When Isaac reaches the age of being able to accept solid food, Abraham throws a huge party on his behalf. The boy is on his way to becoming a man.

Sometime later, Sarah becomes extremely upset in v. 9, because she sees Abraham’s first son, Ishmael, born to him by her Egyptian handmaid, making fun of Isaac. Why is the older brother mocking his younger half-sibling? The Bible does not say, but we can guess based on the rest of this episode. Ishmael most likely has heard about the covenant which God has made with his father, and he presumes that as the firstborn he is the heir of the promises, so that his descendants will become

the greatest nation in history, leaving out Isaac and his descendants. But in v. 10 Sarah makes a bold move and demands that Abraham ostracize both Ishmael and his mother from their family. Perhaps she senses that Ishmael's attitude has its source in Hagar, his mother, and she wants them both gone, "for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." Notice that she says, "my son." Even though it was Sarah herself in Genesis 16 who encouraged Abraham to sire Ishmael by Hagar, now that God has provided her with what she has longed for all along, her own son, Sarah is clear in her mind that Isaac has made Ishmael fundamentally irrelevant with respect to God's promises. And certainly she does not want to hear any of the latter's poor attitude towards *her* son.

Abraham in v. 11 is naturally distressed by the idea of completely pushing his first son out of their family. After all, he is *his* son, even if he is not Sarah's son. But in v. 12 God steps into the scene and informs Abraham that Sarah's idea is not inappropriate and to listen to her, "for through Isaac your descendants shall be named." God is explicitly declaring that Isaac is in and Ishmael is out—with respect to the Abrahamic Covenant and the promises He has made to him. The apostle Paul uses this last statement by God to argue in Romans 9:7 that God has no problem making a distinction between one person and another person, between one group and other group, even within the nation of Israel. With His sovereignty, God chooses one person to receive the fulfillment of His promises, and not another person. Throughout the remainder of history, God will choose some Jews but not others to be members of the promised great nation and obtain eternal life. He will choose some Gentiles and not others to be with Jesus when he returns and participate in the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 and also gain eternal life.

Indeed, in the previous verse Paul says, "All those who are from Israel, these are not Israel." In other words, God has decided that not every physical descendant of Jacob is a member of true Israel, because only those Jews whose inwardness God changes will participate in the "great nation" of Israel at the end of history when Jesus returns, either through being raised from the dead and transformed into morally perfect and immortal beings, or through being converted into authentic believers as mortal sinners who will live in the millennial kingdom. Paul had already intimated this earlier in Romans 2:28-29, "28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Similarly, Genesis 21:12 is saying that God chooses Isaac and his descendants, not Ishmael and his descendants, to be recipients of their father's promises. Nevertheless, God tells Abraham in v. 13 that He will cause Ishmael's descendants to become a nation too. It is just that they will never be the "great nation" of faith, obedience, prosperity, and power that the Jews will be when Jesus returns. Jesus will rule over Ishmael's descendants, and some of them will be Christians at the time, while probably most of them will not. The major difference will be that *all the remaining Jews* will be Christians and they all will be living on the land of Israel during the entire millennial kingdom which God will establish as described in Revelation 20.

Therefore, we have here another piece of clear evidence that God has made a promise to Abraham's *physical* descendants, the Jews, for the sake of their living on the land of Israel as authentic believers at some point in this temporary realm, and not just to his *spiritual* descendants, both Jews and Gentiles who imitate his faith for the sake of obtaining eternal life. Neither does it make sense that God has transferred to Abraham's spiritual descendants, the Church, His promise He made to the Jews. For why would He make such an explicit distinction between Abraham's *physical* descendant, Isaac, and his *physical* descendant, Ishmael, even claiming that the latter will become a "great nation" as He had said in Genesis 17:18 and will say to His mother in 21:18? In other words, physical descendancy from Abraham is perpetually involved in God's first promise to him, while spiritual descendancy is eternally involved in *both* His first promise *and* His second promise to him.

Genesis 22:15-19

22:15 Then the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven,

22:16 and said,

“By Myself I have sworn (נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי), declares Yahweh,¹⁶

because you have done this thing (כִּי יָעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה)

and have not withheld your son, your only son,

22:17 indeed I will greatly bless you (כִּי־בָרַךְ אֶבְרָכְךָ),

and I will greatly multiply your seed (וְהִרְבֵּה אֶרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ)

as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore;

and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies (וְיָרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֶת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו).

22:18 “And in your descendants all the nations of the earth

shall be blessed (וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּזַרְעֲךָ לְכָל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ),

because you have obeyed My voice (לְקַבַּל אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקוֹלִי).”¹⁷

22:19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.

This passage come from the famous chapter of God’s testing Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham has complied right up the to the point of binding Isaac on an altar on Mt. Moriah and raising his knife above him to plunge it into his son’s heart. But the angel of Yahweh, another theophany and created manifestation of the transcendent God, has called out from heaven for him to stop, saying in v. 12, “For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Here in the verses quoted above, Genesis 22:15-19, God speaks to Abraham and (not surprisingly) repeats His promises to him. He begins in v. 16, because Abraham has fulfilled an immediate condition in regard to God’s covenant with him by willingly choosing to sacrifice Isaac, God says, “I Myself have sworn...” that “indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore.” Great nations are characterized by the large number of people—providing them with both power and a thriving economy. As God used the metaphors of the multitude of stars in the sky in Genesis 15 and the numerous dust of the earth in Genesis 13, God employs the first again here in chapter 22 along with the additional metaphor of the sand of the seashore. Thus, He will cause Abraham’s descendants to be vast in number as part of what will make them great—the many generations of Jews who have changed hearts and appropriately believe and obey God.

And He adds a new idea to this covenant—that He swears an oath that He will do this. Therefore, God has *promised* in Genesis 12:1-9 that He will accomplish what He has declared to Abraham. And He has *guaranteed* it through the ceremony of His being the only one who walks between the halves of the dead animals in Genesis 15. Now God includes one more manner of assuring Abraham that He will eventually do exactly what He has said He will do. He *swears an oath* to Himself and by Himself that nothing, but nothing, will prevent Him from transforming Abraham’s descendants, the Jews, into the most powerful nation in history. We will see later in the Old Testament that the potential obstacles to God include the Jews’ stubbornness and hardheartedness. God will even discipline them and expel them from their land, making it look as though He is abandoning them forever. But their exile will be for only a period of time until He decides to gather them back into it and to cause them (finally!!) to be the kind of people He has always required them to be. They will nevertheless return to the land a few times before this final gathering, but they will lack the proper inwardness and change of heart until sometime still future to us.

This promise, guarantee, and oath of God to Abraham also comprises his descendants who “shall possess the gate of their enemies” as stated in v. 17. This means that the Gentile nations, who will have

¹⁶ The Hebrew word such as נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי (*nishba’ti* = I have sworn) is from the verb שָׁבַע (*shava’* = swear an oath), which will appear multiple times in the Old Testament in reference to the Abrahamic Covenant.

¹⁷ The Hebrew words כִּי יָעַן (*kee ya’an* = because) in v. 16 and לְקַבַּל (*‘ayqev* = because) in v. 18 indicate that Abraham has fulfilled the proper condition for God not only to keep His covenant with him, but also to swear an oath that He will keep it. Also the Hebrew words שָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקוֹלִי (*shama’ta be qolee* = you have listened to My voice) refer to what God requires of all people, especially His chosen people, the Jews, that they should all obey Him and embrace His truth.

opposed, harassed, attacked, and even killed the Jews throughout history will suddenly find themselves under their fist. God is going to pull a huge role reversal and cause the Jews to subjugate and rule their enemies while history up to that time will involve the opposite, their enemies' conquering and ruling over them. We will see later in the Old Testament, starting with Deuteronomy 28, more references to this move by God.

In v. 18, God repeats the second promise of the covenant, but He does so in an interesting way, "And in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." God had told Abraham in Genesis 12:3, "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Here I think He means the same thing. Just as any individual from a different ethnic group from Abraham's and who genuinely imitates Abraham's faith will acquire the blessing of eternal life, so also those who imitate the faith of Abraham's numerous descendants, all the Jews, who will be the only Jews alive and who will live on the land when God makes them a "great nation," will obtain the same blessing. God is therefore saying that there will be Gentiles in the other nations of the world during the time of Jesus' reign on the earth after he returns who will become authentic believers in him like the Jews who will be living on the land of Israel and also ruling over the earth with him. And these believing Gentiles will gain the same blessing of eternal life as Abraham and the numerous Jews of the millennial kingdom.

God also here in Genesis 22:18 substitutes "nations" for "families in 12:3, but I think that the meaning is the same. Whether we are talking about groups of people on a small or large scale, some of their members have been "appointed to eternal life," as Luke writes in Acts 14:48 in reference to Gentiles in the Asian city of Pisidian Antioch. As a result, people from all over the world, including every living Jew, will obtain the blessing of Abraham of entering into and dwelling in the Kingdom of God that will truly last forever. In other words, during the millennial kingdom, the entire ethnic group of Israel will be authentic Christians, while *some* Gentiles in the rest of the world will be also and *the rest* of the Gentiles will not.

This passage ends with Abraham's receiving back his son, Isaac, and returning to his current home in Beersheba with the other men who went with them on this journey.

Genesis 26:1-5, 12-14, 23-25

26:1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines.

26:2 And Yahweh appeared (וַיִּרְא) to him and said,

"Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you.

26:3 "Sojourn (גִּיר) in this land and I will be with you and bless you (אֶתְּהַלְלֶנּוּ וְאֶבְרַכְךָ),

for to you and to your descendants I will give

all these lands (כִּי־לָךְ וְלְבְנֶיךָ אֶתְּן אֶת־כָּל־הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵלֶּה),

and I will establish (וְהִקְמֹתִי) the oath which I swore (אֶת־הַשְּׁבֻעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי)

to your father Abraham.

26:4 "And I will multiply your descendants (וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת־בְּנֵיךָ) as the stars of heaven,

and will give your descendants (וְנָתַתִּי לְבְנֵיךָ) all these lands (אֶת־כָּל־הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵלֶּה);

and in your descendants all the nations of the earth

will be blessed (וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּנֵיךָ כָּל־גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ);

26:5 because (שְׁמַע אֲבֹרְהָם בְּקֹלִי) Abraham obeyed Me (עָקַב)

and kept (וַיִּשְׁמַר) My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws (וְתוֹרֹתַי)."

26:6 So Isaac dwelt in Gerar...

26:12 Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And Yahweh blessed him (וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ),

26:13 and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy;

26:14 for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him...

26:23 Then he went up from there [the valley of Gerar] to Beersheba.

26:24 Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said,

“I am the God of your father Abraham;
Do not fear, for I am with you.
I will bless you (וְבֵרַכְתִּיךָ), and multiply your descendants (וְרַבֵּיתִי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ),
For the sake of My servant Abraham.”

26:25 So he built an altar there and called upon the name of Yahweh, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well.

We move on from Abraham to his son, Isaac, when God explicitly confirms the Abrahamic Covenant and its promises to him and this second generation of Jews. He will do so one more time to the third generation—to Isaac’s son Jacob. Before Genesis 26, Isaac has married Rebekah, the sister of Laban who lives in Aram-Naharayim (upper Mesopotamia north of Israel in modern Iraq or Syria) and whom Abraham’s servant brought to him (cf. Genesis 24).¹⁸ She becomes pregnant with fraternal twin boys, and God declares to Rebekah that the younger son will gain ascendancy over the older son (Genesis 25:19-34). This prediction will find its fulfillment later in Genesis 27 when Jacob, with the help of his mother Rebekah, deceives Isaac by pretending to be Esau and obtains his father’s blessing, which will include the Abrahamic Covenant. In the meantime, they are all living in the land of Canaan. Yet, here in v. 1, as had occurred during Abraham’s life and will occur again in the history of the Jews, there is a famine. As a result, Isaac moves his family from Beer-lahai-roi, which means “the well of the living one who sees me,” to Gerar and the land of the Philistines, which is also part of Canaan. Thus, he never leaves the land which God has promised to his father and his descendants.

At some time during the famine, in v. 2, God manifests Himself to Isaac, as He had to his father, and instructs him to stay in Gerar and therefore in the land of Canaan—in spite of the famine and his father’s having gone down to Egypt during a famine in his day (cf. Genesis 12:12-20). Even though there might be plenty of food in Egypt, God forbids Isaac to go there, because we will find out that He has special plans for him. In v. 3, God even commands Isaac to sojourn, i.e., stay temporarily, in this land. The word “sojourn” refers to Isaac’s situation that is the same as his father Abraham’s, that he never fully settles down in the land as if he owns it. In addition, God commands Isaac in v. 2, “Stay in the land of which I shall tell you.” God’s description of the land, that it is the one “of which I shall tell you,” is probably like His command to Abraham in Genesis 12:1 to go “to the land which I will show you.” To “show” the land to Abraham is the same as to “tell” Isaac about it. It is to promise it to them and to their descendants.

Therefore, God goes on in v. 3 to repeat explicitly the same promises which He had made to Abraham. First, He tells Isaac, “I will be with you and bless you,” meaning that He will be constantly faithful and loyal to him and make sure that he receives the fulfillment of His promises, including eternal life. We will see that, while it may not have been clear in Genesis 12:2 when God said that He would bless Abraham, in this case His blessing is actually more than eternal life. God then says in v. 3, “For to you and to your descendants I will give these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham.” Perpetual ownership of the land of Canaan, therefore, is part of the blessing which God is giving to Isaac. God adds that this is what He had sworn to Abraham (in Genesis 22:15-18 during the “sacrifice of Isaac”).

As part of this first promise, God tells Isaac in v. 4, “And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands.” God used the same metaphor in Genesis 15:5 and 22:17 to inform Abraham that eventually the Jews will be countless numerous when they actually possess the land, which will occur during many generations at the end of the

¹⁸ Terah was the father of both Abraham and Nahor (and of Haran, Lot’s father) (cf. Genesis 11:27-32). Even though God made His eternal covenant with Abraham, Nahor also worshiped Him. His grandson Laban, in making a covenant with Jacob, who will marry two of his daughters, Leah and Rachel, says in [Genesis 31:53](#), “The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” The verse goes on to indicate, “So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac,” that is, by the fear of the God of Abraham and Isaac, who is also the God of Abraham’s brother Nahor, Laban’s grandfather. Thus we learn that Abraham was not the only one of his siblings who worshiped God, and he probably knew this so that this was the reason why he wanted his son Isaac to marry within the family to guard against attaching himself to a woman of the land of Canaan who worshiped pagan gods and thereby bringing this unwelcome influence into the descendants of God’s promise.

present realm in what I have referred to as the millennial kingdom (cf. Revelation 20). In v. 4 God also restates the second promise of the Abrahamic Covenant with the same wording as He did to Abraham in Genesis 22:18, “In your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” Just as any individual from a different ethnic group from Abraham’s and who genuinely imitates Abraham’s faith will acquire the blessing of eternal life, so also those who imitate the faith of Isaac’s numerous descendants, the same multitude of descendants of Abraham, who will live on the land when God makes them a “great nation,” will obtain the same blessing. Once again, God is saying that there will be *some* Gentiles in the other nations of the world during the time of Jesus’ reign on the earth after he returns who will become authentic believers in him like *all* the Jews who will be living on the land of Israel. And these believing Gentiles will gain the same blessing of eternal life as Abraham, Isaac, and the numerous Jews during the millennial kingdom.

Also, in v. 5 God provides an explicit reason why He will fulfill this promise for Isaac. It is because of his father. God says, “because *Abraham* obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws [emphasis mine].” This is interesting. Because his father fulfilled the necessary condition that will result in God’s fulfilling His promises, Isaac also will receive the fulfillment of the same promises. I think that God’s explanation has three intended purposes for Isaac. First, it is meant as an *exhortation* to him to believe God for His promises as his father had done. Therefore, by satisfying the same condition as his father, Isaac will eventually see the fulfillment of the same promises. Secondly, it is meant as an *encouragement* to him, that what God had guaranteed to Abraham by means of the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15, He also guarantees to Isaac. God is pledging to him that He will cause him and his descendants to meet the necessary condition to possess the land of Canaan and become the most powerful nation in human history—just as He caused Abraham to perform and manifest this condition. Thirdly, it is meant *to teach* Isaac that the Abrahamic Covenant is truly conditional in the midst of its being guaranteed (not contingent). The covenant requires Isaac and his physical descendants, the Jews, to guard and obey from their hearts all that God commands them—His “charge,” His “commandments,” His “statutes,” and His “laws.” God will use all four words in the Mosaic Covenant that He will make with the Israelites when Moses leads them out of slavery in Egypt. However, He is now saying to Isaac, approximately five hundred years before Moses, that already He has issued the same kind of instructions to Abraham. Indeed the Hebrew word “laws” is the plural form of Torah, which means instruction, i.e., that which has been taught to human beings that they should genuinely embrace and obey as the manner in which they demonstrate that they are God’s people.

We tend to think of the Mosaic Covenant as the Law, indeed the only Law which God gave to Israel. But here God declares in Genesis 26:5 that Abraham was subject to His Law and presented with commandments that he had to keep and, therefore, with conditions that he had to satisfy as much as the Israelites will be presented with and have to keep the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant five hundred years later. For example, we have seen God issue His Torah and instructions to Abraham first in Genesis 12:1, “Go to the land which I will show you,” then in Genesis 15:1, “Do not fear, Abraham, I am a shield to you,” then in Genesis 17:1,10-14, “Walk before Me and be blameless...And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations,” and also in Genesis 22:2, that I did not quote, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” And Abraham guarded in his heart and kept these commandments by performing them and this Torah of God, so that the promises which God gave to him are now being passed down to the next generation who also must obey God’s commandments and the Torah as it currently exists in their lives. Nevertheless, God likewise guarantees to Isaac that he will keep them—because God will cause him to do so. And Isaac’s guarding God’s Torah reveals itself in v. 6 by his remaining in Gerar and not going down to Egypt where he could probably obtain food more easily.

We skip verses 7-11 and learn in the next paragraph why God wanted Isaac to stay in the land of Canaan during the famine. It is because He uses him as a sign of his special status to the Gentile

nations in the land, especially to the Philistines who “envied him” (v. 14). We read in v. 12, “Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold.” Perhaps other people are suffering during the famine, but certainly not Isaac and his family. The text goes on in v. 12-14 to say, “And Yahweh blessed him, and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household.” Here we see that God’s blessing of Isaac is explicitly by means of material possessions and his household of people for whom he is responsible. As a result, “the Philistines envied him.” God was clearly not blessing the unbelieving Gentile nations, while making a clear distinction between them and the Jews as He demonstrated His special favor towards Abraham’s descendants, a distinction which will become even more obvious when He makes them the most powerful nation in history at the end of the present age.

Jumping ahead to vs. 23-24, Isaac leaves Gerar after his “sojourn” there and goes to stay temporarily in Beersheba where God appears to him the night he arrives.¹⁹ First, He states that He is the God of his father Abraham, reminding him that all that He had promised to his father He was also promising to him, under the condition that he believe and obey Him as Abraham had done. Then God commands and assures Isaac with the same words, “Do not fear,” and with the same idea from Genesis 15:1 as His being a shield to him, “I am with you.” And once more He declares to Isaac, “I will bless you and multiply your descendants.” Isaac will be both a man of faith and the ancestor of a multitude of people—who will constitute the great nation which God promised to Abraham. And He says that He will do this “for the sake of My servant Abraham.” It is true that Isaac will see the fulfillment of God’s promises, but it is Abraham who can claim that He was the first to receive these promises and that it is his name that will become famous and respected worldwide as God said in Genesis 12:2.

In v. 25 Isaac takes these words of Yahweh to heart, builds an altar to Him at Beersheba, and pitches his temporary dwelling there. In addition, his servants dig water wells—always a necessity for survival. Isaac’s final location at the end of Genesis 35 will be northeast of Beersheba and south of Jerusalem, in the city of Hebron, where both his mother and father will be buried and where he also will find his final resting place until the first resurrection of Revelation 20.

Genesis 28:1-4, 10-22

28:1 So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him (וַיְבָרֶךְ אִתּוֹ) and charged him, and said to him, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.

28:2 “Arise, go to Paddan-Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.

28:3 “May God Almighty bless you (וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהֵי) and make you fruitful (וַיַּרְבֵּךְ) and multiply you (וַיַּרְבֵּךְ), that you may become a company of peoples (לְקַתְּלֵ עַמִּים).

28:4 “And may He give you the blessing of Abraham (וַיִּתֵּן לְךָ אֶת־בְּרַכְתּוֹ אֲבִיךָ), to you and to your descendants with you (לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֶךָ אִתְּךָ), that you may possess the land of your sojournings (לְרִשְׁתָּךְ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֶיךָ), which God gave to Abraham (אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם)”...

28:10 Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran.

28:11 He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.

¹⁹ Three possible translations for בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע – 1) Seven Wells; 2) The Well of Abundance; 3) The Well of the Oath. In this context, The Well of the Oath makes sense because in Genesis 26:33 Isaac names the place Shibah after his servants inform him that they have found water. I think that Isaac is commemorating God’s keeping His oath to bless him even during his life in accord with the Abrahamic promises. It also correlates with the Greek translation of both Genesis 26:23 and Genesis 26:33, which uses the words τὸ φρέαρ τοῦ ὄρκου = The Well of Oath. In addition, Abraham had already named the place Beersheba in Genesis 21:31 when he made an oath with Abimelech and Phicol, the king and commander of the army of the Philistines respectively. Thus, Isaac chooses the same name and does not change it. Either the Hebrew words for “swear” and “oath” are derived from the word “seven,” or the other way around.

28:12 He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God (מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים) were ascending and descending on it.

28:13 And behold, Yahweh stood above it and said,

“I am Yahweh, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac;

the land on which you lie (הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שׁוֹכֵב עָלֶיהָ),

I will give it to you and to your descendants (לְךָ וְלְאֶחָד מֵעַמְּךָ).

28:14 “Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth,

and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south;

and in you and in your descendants shall all the families

of the earth be blessed (וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כָּל־כְּלֵמֶשֶׁפֶת הָאָרֶץ וּבְנֵי עַמְּךָ).

28:15 “Behold, I am with you and will keep you (וְשָׁמְרָתִיךָ) wherever you go,

and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you

until I have done what I have said to you.”

28:16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I did not know it.”

28:17 He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

28:18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top.

28:19 He called the name of that place Bethel (בֵּית־אֵל); however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.

28:20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying,

“If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take,

and will give me food to eat and garments to wear,

28:21 and I return to my father’s house in safety, then Yahweh will be my God.

28:22 “This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house,

and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”

Here in Genesis 28 we witness God’s affirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant to the third generation of Jews, to Abraham’s grandson, Jacob. He will be the last person to see and hear God directly until He appears as the burning bush to Moses approximately 400 years later. Previously in Genesis 27, Jacob with the help of his mother Rebekah had deceived Isaac by pretending to be his older brother Esau so that he obtained his father’s blessing, which includes the Abrahamic Covenant. This is similar to Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, where God passed down the covenant to the younger son instead of giving it to Ishmael. Here in chapter 28, verses 1-4 describe Isaac’s own hope that Jacob will receive the same blessings and promises that God had given to his father Abraham and him. Thus he blesses him in v. 1, but he also stipulates that he never marry any of the Canaanite women living on the land of his present dwelling. Instead in v. 2, as Abraham had similarly arranged for Isaac through his servant, Jacob himself must go to the land of Paddan-Aram, north of Canaan, and find a wife from his mother’s family, “from the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.”

Isaac adds in v. 3 his wish that “God Almighty,” the same El Shaddai who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 17:1, bless Jacob by making his descendants numerous, “that [he] may become a company (literally “gathering”) of peoples.” He goes on in v. 4 to hope that God will grant the same “blessing of Abraham” to Jacob, that he inherit and possess the land on which he has been living (and will continue living after he obtains a wife). Jacob emphasizes that this is the land “which God gave to Abraham.” And as with his grandfather, this is “the land of [Jacob’s] sojournings,” meaning that he too will never settle permanently on it even though God has promised it to him. I think that we can also interpret Isaac’s blessing to Jacob as including eternal life, as was the case for both him and his father Abraham. Thus, Isaac affirms almost the entirety of the Abrahamic Covenant for and to Jacob. The only thing missing, which God Himself will add in a moment, is the eternal blessing that will go out to his descendants and the rest of the world.

Next in vs. 10-15 we see God personally appear in the famous passage of Jacob’s Ladder and repeat the Abrahamic Covenant to him. Jacob obeys his father and leaves Beersheba in the southern

part of the land of Canaan to begin his journey north to the city of Haran. It was to this city that Abraham and Sarah had first traveled with his father Terah at the end of Genesis 11 and where Terah had died before he continued south into the land of Canaan. But Jacob does not reach Haran before nightfall. So he takes a stone for a pillow, lies down, and is soon asleep. Then comes the dream. He sees a ladder, firmly standing on the earth and reaching into the sky, into heaven itself where God dwells. He also observes “angels of God” climbing up and down the ladder. In addition, God Himself appears to Jacob in the dream. The Hebrew text may be saying that He is standing above the ladder, or it may be saying that He is standing at the bottom of it, holding and supporting it (the latter according to the Greek translation of the Old Testament), as the angels ascend and descend on it. In either case, God appears in the dream to this third generation Jew and speaks directly to him.

In v. 13, God’s first words are, “I am Yahweh, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.” It is not that God is claiming that Abraham is literally Jacob’s “father,” but that he is his patriarch, the lead generation of this ethnic group whom He has chosen to be His people on this earth throughout its history. God is referring to “Father Abraham,” as he will be called by both Jews and Christians, who acknowledge that they are his bona fide descendants, either both physically and spiritually by exhibiting the same kind of belief in Yahweh (the Jews), or simply spiritually also by choosing to believe in God and Jesus, His Messiah (Christians). Plus, God is saying that both Abraham and Jacob’s own immediate father Isaac worshiped, believed, and obeyed Him. We will see that His claim to be someone’s or some group’s God (so that they are His people) is an important technical phrase in the Old Testament that identifies those whose hearts God has changed with the result that they genuinely believe what He says is true and submit to His commandments, statements, and instructions (His *mitzoth* (מִצְוֹת), *chugqoth* (חֻקֹּת), and *toroth* (תּוֹרֹת)), which according to Genesis 26:5 Abraham had kept and guarded. It will be at the end of the present realm, when God fulfills His first promise to Abraham, that the entire remaining nation of Israel will do so.

Verse 13 continues with God’s explicitly affirming His promise of the land of Canaan to Jacob and his descendants. However, He calls it “the land on which you lie.” We are not told if Jacob has pitched any kind of tent for his overnight lodging. Thus, this may very well be the bare ground on which he is lying with a stone for a pillow under his head. Again, there is reference to the lack of permanent dwelling by one of the first three Jews. Certainly, Jacob is on a trip, away from his family and “home” in Beersheba, but God takes the opportunity to make His point very explicitly. In Genesis 13:17, God had said to Abraham, “Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.” In other words, this is the land that Abraham experienced with the soles of his feet. Here in chapter 28, it is the very dirt that Jacob is sensing with practically his entire body. How much more explicit can God get in regard to this specific piece of real estate and its final destiny as the possession and country for His chosen people the Jews?

In v. 14, God repeats His promise that Jacob’s (and therefore Abraham’s and Isaac’s) physical descendants will number in the millions, “like the dust of the earth” (the same metaphor as in Genesis 13:16 and 22:17). Then, God provides more detail than before about what it will mean for the Jews both to be numerous and owners of the land of Canaan. They “will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.” In other words, they will inhabit the entirety of the land, showing that they own it because God has given it to them and to no one else. Approximately twelve hundred years later, the prophet Isaiah will make it clear that any Gentile (non-Jew) who lives on the land with them when God fulfills His promise to them will by necessity be someone who has a changed heart and worships God in exactly the same manner as the Jews (cf. Isaiah 56:6,7).

God finishes v. 14 with the last part of His second promise to Abraham, but He combines the ways He stated it both to Abraham and to Isaac. To Abraham God said, “And **in you** all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3), and “In your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). To Isaac He said, “And **in your descendants** all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 26:4). Here in chapter 28 God declares to Jacob, “And **in you and in your descendants** will all the families of the earth be blessed” [all three emphases mine]. I think that God is affirming that He has caused and will continue to cause Jacob to be an authentic believer. Thus the

“in you.” And God is affirming that eventually all Jacob’s descendants will be authentic believers also. Thus the “in your descendants.” The result is that both Jews and Gentiles who imitate the faith of Jacob and his physical descendants who comprise the future “great nation” of Israel will gain eternal life from God.

God provides Jacob in v. 15 with an example of what He means by confirming His Abrahamic pledges to him. He assures him that He will make him succeed both in his mission of finding a wife in Paddan-Aram and in his returning to the land of Canaan in order to continue to sojourn there like his grandfather and father. He says, “I am with you,” another technical phrase in the Old Testament to indicate not only God’s presence in and around a person, but also His faithful commitment to preserve his belief and to fulfill both His temporary and His eternal purposes for him. Thus David assures himself in Psalm 23:4 –

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Likewise, in Isaiah 7 around 730 B.C., God encourages King Ahaz by providing him with a sign of His commitment to protect the southern Kingdom of Judah from the attacks of the northern Kingdom of Israel which is in league with the Kingdom of Aram. The sign will be a boy who is born to a young woman in Ahaz’s day, and the boy’s name will be Immanuel, meaning “God is with us!” In His statement to Jacob, God also goes on to say, “I will keep you wherever you go.” He uses the same verb, *shamar* (=guard, keep), that was in His praise of Abraham in Genesis 26:5 who “kept (*shamar*) My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.” God will hold Jacob close to His heart, and He guarantees that he will succeed where Isaac has commanded him to find a wife and return to the land of Canaan, as well as in his continuing to believe and obey God throughout the rest of his life—even though he is no less a sinner than the rest of us. It is this latter kind of “success” that God promises to all those throughout history whom He has chosen to believe and obey Him and who will obtain His final and ultimate blessing of eternal life. They obey God in their sinfulness, never being morally perfect in the present realm, and they persevere in their faith and eventually obtain entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God.

The last part of God’s example to Jacob of His faithfulness to the Abrahamic promises is when He ends with the words, “I will bring you back to this land.” Jacob will leave the land temporarily to obtain a wife from his mother’s relatives. But afterwards he will return to it, implying that he belongs on it and it belongs to him—even though he will sojourn on it like his grandfather and father. Next, God provides another statement of His reason for ensuring that Jacob accomplishes all that he has set out to do, “For I will not leave you until I have done what I have said to you.” This sounds a little confusing. Is God telling Jacob that He will be faithful to him only up to the moment when He returns to the land, and then He will abandon him? Clearly not. The English translation “until” of the Hebrew *‘ad* (עד) makes it sound like this, but God is simply promising to him that His constant loyalty to Jacob will exist in an active and uninterrupted manner all the way through his journey to and from Paddan-Aram. These words will be very important to Jacob because it will be another twenty years of hard labor for his brother-in-law in order to acquire his wives (yes, plural) before he returns to the land of Canaan (cf. Genesis 31:18). And even then, he will be afraid of the wrath of his brother Esau, whose blessing he stole by deceiving his father.

But God’s faithfulness to Jacob regarding the personal and individual matters of a wife and finding his way back to the land also implies that His same faithfulness will persist throughout the rest of Jacob’s life—and also throughout the existence of the people of Israel until God has finished making them the “great nation” and displaying them in all their (God-given!) glory to the rest of the world for as long as He has planned. It may seem a small thing for Jacob to acquire a wife from his relatives and return to the land of Canaan, but it is a huge indicator of God’s loyal and faithful

commitment to him and his descendants in the present realm—and to all those who emulate their faith for the sake of their own eternal lives and being with Jesus when he returns!

When Jacob wakes up in v. 16, he knows that he has had a direct encounter with God in that very place, and he names it Bethel, the House of God, saying, “How awesome is this place!” He is afraid, but in the sense that he respects and reveres God above anyone or anything else in the world. Then he assures God (and himself) by making a vow that he will remain a faithful believer in God if He will remain faithful to him by taking care of all his physical needs during the trip to Paddan-Aram and bring him safely back to Canaan. It sounds as though Jacob is placing the same kind of condition on God that God has placed on him. But it stands to reason that, if God forfeits His promises to us, even us *sinful* human beings, then we certainly are under no obligation to remain faithful to Him. Indeed, why would anyone choose to be a loyal friend to someone who abandons him?

Yet!! This is exactly what God does to Israel even though later they disobey Him to the highest degree. God has promised that the Jews will become a great nation, and this promise stands in spite of their rebelling against Him, which they clearly demonstrate during the rest of their history, including their rejecting and executing their own Messiah, Jesus. But what if God were to forsake His promises to the Jews because of their rejecting Him? He certainly has the right to abandon them completely. However, God would be violating the terms of the covenant which He made with Abraham in Genesis 15. There, He *guaranteed* that the covenant would be kept by both of them, and He *swore an oath* to the same effect in Genesis 22. Jacob knows this. Therefore, he is not suggesting that there is any possibility that God will not ensure his safety and success to and from Paddan-Aram, where he will find a wife. Instead, he is using an “if...then” sentence that appears to place a condition on God, which He might not meet, to encourage himself that God *is* faithful. Therefore, he is saying that he, Jacob, will not only find success in obtaining a wife but also continue to be a true worshiper of God. Jacob knows that it is theologically impossible for Yahweh not to be his God.

And he ends his self-assuring prayer by taking the stone which was his pillow and setting it up as a memorial to this occasion where God has been with him, which is to say where God’s “house” exists. We can extrapolate and conclude that wherever we are, in whom God dwells through His Spirit, is our own Bethel. We are always in God’s house. Then Jacob also says that he will give a tenth of all he obtains and possesses to God. When God makes the Mosaic Covenant with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai four hundred years or so later, tithing to Him will take the form of giving a tenth to the Levitical priests. Here, it is not clear what Jacob means, because a sacrificial system with designated priests does not yet exist. So exactly what is Jacob going to do with a tenth of his possessions? Saying the words, “I will give a tenth to You,” simply could be his way of acknowledging that everything he has and obtains during this trip comes from the transcendent Creator whom he worships and obeys—even if there is no ritual that outwardly reveals this.

Genesis 32:24-30

32:24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man (אִישׁ) wrestled with him until daybreak.

32:25 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

32:26 Then he said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.” But he said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me (כִּי אִם-בֵּרַכְתָּנִי).”

32:27 So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.”

32:28 He said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel (כִּי אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל); for you have striven with God and with men (כִּי-שָׁרִיתָ עִם-אֱלֹהִים וְעִם-אָנָשִׁים) and have prevailed (וַתִּשְׁבֹּר).”

32:29 Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there (וַיִּבְרַךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם).

32:30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face (כִּי-רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים), yet my life has been preserved.”

In Genesis 32, Jacob reenters the land of Canaan after spending twenty years in Paddan-Aram. With him are two wives, two mistresses, twelve sons, many servants, and flocks. Now he is preparing to meet his brother Esau, whose disposition towards him he does not know, and he sends his entire family, servants, and worldly goods ahead of him so that his brother encounters them first. He separates a large quantity of his flocks and work animals as a gift that he instructs his servants to offer to Esau to appease any residual anger he may feel towards him on account of the stolen blessing of their father Isaac. The entire group crosses the River Jabbok somewhere along its length, which begins 25 miles east of the Dead Sea in modern day Jordan at an altitude of 2,500 ft. and flows into the Jordan River at 1,150 ft. below sea level approximately 40 miles northeast of Jerusalem and 30 miles north of the Dead Sea. Jacob is left alone at the Jabbok to spend the night wondering what the next day will bring—friendship with his brother or his wrath to try to destroy him and his family. He has prayed to God earlier in this chapter in line with His promise in Genesis 28:13-15 –

32:9 ...“O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, Yahweh, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,’

32:10 I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness (קִמְנֹתַי מִכֹּל הַחַסְדִּים וּמִכֹּל הָאֱמֻנָה) which You have shown to Your servant;²⁰

for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.

32:11 “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children.

32:12 “For You said, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.’”

Will God answer Jacob’s prayer in the affirmative? Of course He will! Because this is exactly what He has promised to do—to be with him during the trip north to Paddan-Aram and back to Canaan (cf. Genesis 28:15), and God always fulfills His promises. But first, Jacob must pass a test of his faith, just as his grandfather Abraham did when God commanded him to sacrifice his unique son through Sarah, Isaac. He has to wrestle a man and not permit him to defeat him for as long as the wrestling match takes place, which is all night. As dawn breaks, the man commands Jacob to let him go, but he refuses until the man blesses him. I think during the night-long encounter with this man, Jacob has figured out that he is a theophany, a visible and material manifestation of the invisible and transcendent God. In other words, he is wrestling with God, and therefore, just as God has already promised in Genesis 28, he wants God to repeat all his commitments to him—to make Jacob’s descendants numerous and a great nation, and to grant him eternal life. Obviously, the only way the first part of these commitments can happen is if Jacob and his family survive any kind of hostility which Esau may exhibit towards them.

The man, God, asks Jacob his name, and he responds accordingly. Then God tells him that from this time forward he will have a new name, Israel (*Yisrael*), which means “the one who wrestles with God.” Jacob has wrestled with not only God, but also Laban in order to obtain his family of two wives, two mistresses, and his twelve sons. And the key is that he has “prevailed.” The Hebrew word literally means that Jacob “has been able,” which is to say that He has had the physical, emotional, and spiritual strength not to let go of God in this wrestling match. He has passed the test not only physically and emotionally, but most importantly spiritually. He has persevered in his belief that God would return him to the land of Canaan and prosper him with family, descendants, and material possessions. Thus “Israel” becomes the name of the entire group of people who come from Abraham,

²⁰ The first Hebrew word in Genesis 32:10, חֶסֶד (*hesed* = constant, loyal, faithful commitment and love) is perhaps the most important word in the Old Testament. It refers to God’s constant and loyal committed love to His people to fulfill the promises which He made to Abraham and is first used in this sense in Genesis 24:27 by Abraham’s servant when he is speaking to Isaac’s wife-to-be Rebekah in the land of Aram. The second word, אֱמֻנָה (*ha’emeth*) from אֱמֶת (*’emeth* = truth, faith, faithfulness) equally applies to God’s faithfulness.

Isaac, and Jacob and who will wrestle with God and other people, even with themselves, until they finally obtain His promise of being the greatest nation in human history when Jesus returns.

Jacob then asks the man for his name, and he responds, “Why?” He knows who he is, and subsequently he does bless him, which we assume is his confirming God’s promises of greatness to the nation of Israel and eternal life to Jacob and people like him of genuine belief. Even though the man never says directly that he is God, Jacob names the place Peniel, which means “the face of God.” Thus, he has “seen” God, at least His theophany, and he is relieved to know now that God did not strike him dead—we assume for his sinfulness, which always deserves death.

But before God even asks Jacob to let go of him, while they are still wrestling and as the new day is dawning, He touches the socket of his thigh and dislocates his hip. This had to be painful, and the pain must have been a reminder for a long time to Jacob of his encounter with God and the renewal of His promises. Similarly, pain of any kind should always motivate us to remember what this life is mostly about—embracing the truth of the good news of eternal mercy, salvation, and life through Jesus the Messiah so that we are willing to wait until God fulfills this promise in our lives too.

Genesis 35:9-15

35:9 Then God appeared (וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים) to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-Aram, and He blessed him (וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ).

35:10 God said to him,
 “Your name is Jacob;
 You shall no longer be called Jacob,
 But Israel (כִּי אִשְׂרָאֵל) shall be your name.”
 Thus He called him Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל).

35:11 God also said to him,
 “I am God Almighty;
 Be fruitful and multiply (פְּרֹה וּרְבֵה);
 A nation and a company of nations shall come from you (גּוֹי וְקָהָל גּוֹיִם יִהְיֶה מִכָּמֶךָ),
 And kings shall come forth from you.

35:12 “The land (אֶרֶץ הָאֲרָץ) which I gave to Abraham and Isaac (אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם וְלִיִּצְחָק),
 I will give it to you (לְךָ אֶתְנֶנָּה),
 And I will give the land to your descendants after you (וְיָלְדָתְּךָ אַחֲרָיִךְ אֶתְנֶנָּה אֶת־הָאֲרָץ).”

35:13 Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him.

35:14 Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it.

35:15 So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel (בֵּית־אֵל).

This is God’s third appearance to Jacob. The first had been in Genesis 28 when he was traveling north from the land of Canaan to Paddan-Aram in order to obtain a wife from his mother’s relatives. And the second was on his return in Genesis 32 when he wrestled with a human theophany of God before he crossed the River Jabbok. Here in v. 9 of chapter 35, the author informs us that God’s purpose for this appearance is to bless him, which will be both temporally and eternally. In v. 10, He reminds him that He has changed his name to Israel, which means “the one who wrestles with God.” Next, in v. 11, God identifies Himself with the same title as He used with Abraham in Genesis 17:1, El Shaddai, which means God Almighty as it is translated.

Then, God commands Jacob to “be fruitful and multiply,” the first such command to a patriarch. He has already told all three men, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that their descendants will be as numerous as the stars of heaven, the sand of the sea, and the dust of the earth. He also said to Abraham in Genesis 17:6, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful.” But now God actually instructs Jacob to do what He has promised. He also makes an explicit statement to the effect that this is exactly what is going to happen. Indeed, “a nation and a company of nations” as well as “kings” will issue forth from him. As in Genesis 17:6 when God says to Abraham, “I will make nations of you,

and kings will come forth from you,” I think that He is telling Jacob that the generations of his sons after them will be many, and eventually they will live under a monarchy. We will see later in the Old Testament that within a thousand years God will give the Israelites two kings, first Saul and then David, and He will make a covenant with David to preserve his dynasty into perpetuity, which is to say, for as long as God desires the Kingdom of Israel—first, to survive both the internal destructive effects of the Jews’ immorality and rebellion against God as well as the external effects of their foreign enemies who try to destroy them, and second, to flourish when Jesus returns and restores the kingdom during his reign on earth.

In v. 12, God repeats what He has said to Abraham and Isaac, that the land on which Jacob is living, the land of Canaan, belongs to him and to his descendants who follow after him. Implied is that this land is where the “great nation” of the Jews will dwell and thrive under God’s leadership through their king. Of course, we know the king to be Jesus the Messiah when he returns.

This passage ends in vs. 13-15 with God’s leaving Jacob and Jacob’s rededicating this same place with the name Bethel (“House of God”), which he had given it when God first appeared to him in Genesis 28 in the dream of the ladder and confirmed the same promises of Abraham to him and assured him that he would succeed in his goal of obtaining a wife in Paddan-Aram and returning to the land of Canaan.

Genesis 46:1-4

46:1 So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

46:2 God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.”

46:3 He said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there (כִּי־לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל אֶשְׁמְרֶנְךָ שָׁם).

46:4 “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes.”

Much has happened since Genesis 35. Jacob’s favorite son, Joseph, has been sold into slavery by his brothers, and he has ended up in Egypt where he becomes through a series of difficult yet miraculous circumstances a key ruler of the country, second in command to only Pharaoh. A seven-year famine has begun, and now Jacob with his eleven other sons and their families are moving from Canaan to Egypt in order to be closer to Joseph and the food which he has stored during the previous seven years of plenty. On his way south, Jacob comes to the city of Beersheba, and he offers sacrifices to his father’s God, who of course is his God. But he is honoring both Abraham and his father Isaac, who both named the city Beersheba (“The Well of Oath”), by worshiping their God.

God appears for the fourth time to Jacob, and in this situation it is through the medium of his dreams as he sleeps at night. He calls to him in v. 2, “Jacob, Jacob.” And Jacob acknowledges that it is he and that he is listening. Then in v. 3 God states that He is his father’s God, which of course means that He is also his grandfather’s God. This is God’s way of assuring Jacob that he need not be afraid of leaving the land which belongs to him, the land of Canaan, and moving to a foreign land, that of Egypt. For God has a specific purpose, which he mentioned to Abraham in Genesis 15, to multiply the Israelites in Egypt and even make them a “great nation there.” We know that God is not referring to the original promise of Genesis 12:1-2 to Abraham to form his descendants into a “great nation,” because, in the previous passage of Genesis 35, we learned that this will include a monarchy with a Jewish king. But the Jews do not acquire their own king for another five hundred years after the story of Exodus and their leaving Egypt. Nevertheless, God will increase the population of the Jews in Egypt, making them so great that the Egyptians will fear them. And then He will bring them back to the land of Canaan under the leadership of Moses.

God thus promises to Jacob that He will always be with him in Egypt, as He has been with him in Canaan and Paddan-Aram. Also, his son Joseph will “close [his] eyes,” meaning that Jacob will die in Egypt before he can return to the land which God has given him and his descendants into perpetuity.

Genesis 50:22-26

50:22 Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.

50:23 Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees.

50:24 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land (אֶל-הָאָרֶץ) which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob (אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלְיַעֲקֹב)."

50:25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

50:26 So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Genesis 50 is the last chapter of the book. Verses 1-14, which I have not quoted, indicate that Jacob has died, and Joseph with his brothers have traveled north to Mamre (Hebron) in the land of Canaan to bury him in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah are buried (cf. Genesis 49:29-33). Then, they all return to Egypt and remain there. In addition, we are told in v. 23 above that Joseph has been fortunate enough to see the great-grandchildren of his younger son Ephraim and the grandchildren of his older son Manasseh. Their mother was Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, a priest of the Egyptian pagan gods (cf. Genesis 41:45ff.). Before he dies, Joseph repeats to his brothers God's promise to their father Jacob that He will "take care of" them while they sojourn in Egypt until it is time to "bring you up from this land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Therefore, even though it will take another three hundred years or so, God will nevertheless make sure that His people survive whatever ordeals they experience outside the promised land in order to bring them back to it. This will be a common theme throughout Israel's history. They will find themselves exiled and dispersed to Assyria, Babylon, as far west as Greece, Italy, and Spain, as far east as Persia, and then eventually to the far reaches of the world—Argentina, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, etc. Yet, at the end of the present realm, God will gather the Jews back into the land, and the remnant will survive The Great and Terrible Day of Yahweh as to be described by the prophets and will all worship Him as their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did—with changed hearts and authentic faith.

Joseph also makes his brothers (and therefore their descendants, depending on how many generations remain in Egypt until God brings them all out) swear that they will preserve his bones after he dies and carry them with them back to the land of Canaan. Just as with Jacob before him, we can surmise that Joseph wants to rise from the dead from the land which God has promised to him and his descendants. Finally, we learn that Joseph dies after living one hundred and ten years, and the Egyptians use their embalming method to maintain the integrity of his body as well as possible and place him in a coffin. His body's journey from Egypt to Canaan will begin in Exodus 13 as the Israelites escape from their slavery under Moses' leadership. However, the Bible does not tell us about the end of his body's journey.

Exodus 3:1-12

3:1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

3:2 The angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a blazing fire (וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָכְדִּי הַיְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלֶבֶת-אֵשׁ) from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

3:3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up."

3:4 When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

3:5 Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

3:6 He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

3:7 Yahweh said, “I have surely seen (וַיֵּרְאֵהוּ יְהוָה) the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.”

3:8 “So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up (וַיִּלְהַעֲלֵהוּ) from that land to a good and spacious land (אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרַחְבָּה), to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

3:9 “Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.

3:10 “Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”

3:11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”

3:12 And He said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”

Approximately five hundred years after Abraham, around 1500 B.C., his descendants, the Israelites, are living in slavery in Egypt—as predicted by God in Genesis 15. They have become so numerous that the Pharaoh decrees that all newborn boys be killed. The Jewish midwives refuse to comply and make the excuse that the Jewish women are too vigorous and give birth and protect their sons immediately before they can kill them. In the midst of this genocidal attempt, a special son is born to a Jewish couple of the tribe of Levi, and his mother puts him in a reed basket which she floats on the Nile River, hoping to save him from certain death. The Pharaoh’s daughter finds him and takes him into her household, while hiring his mother, who is not known to her, as his nursemaid. After Moses grows up, he kills an Egyptian slave master and flees Pharaoh’s wrath to the land of Midian where he marries Zipporah, the daughter of one of the Midianites’ priests, Jethro. In Exodus 3, Moses is pasturing his father-in-law’s flock on the west side of Mt. Horeb, the same mountain where God will soon make the Mosaic Covenant with His people, the Israelites.

In v. 2 we learn that God’s “angel,” His messenger (as the Hebrew word means), appears to Moses in the form of a burning bush. Moses’ obvious response in v. 3 is to investigate this spectacle to learn why the fire is not consuming the bush. God speaks to him from the bush in v. 4, “Moses, Moses,” and he responds, “Here I am.” God then declares that Moses is standing on holy ground so that he should remove his sandals. Then He identifies Himself in v. 6, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Thus God implies that these three men (and Moses’ father besides) have received the two promises and repetitive confirmation of these promises that He initially made to Abraham. These are the promises of the Jews’ becoming the greatest nation in history and of these men and those with faith like them acquiring eternal life.

When Moses realizes that he is the presence of the transcendent creator, he becomes afraid—most likely because he is appropriately aware of his sinfulness and therefore deserves God’s wrath, condemnation, and destruction. God ignores his fear in v. 7 and goes on to say that He is very aware of His chosen people’s suffering in Egypt and intends to rescue them and return them to the land of Canaan. And for the first time, God describes this land as “a good and spacious land, ...a land flowing with milk and honey.” However the land is not currently so spacious because it is “the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite” (v. 8). And I think God uses the metaphor of prosperity, “a land flowing with milk and honey,” not because this is always the case, but because God will cause the Jews to flourish on the land when He fulfills His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make their descendants a “great nation.” And as

in Genesis 15:19-21, God makes clear exactly which piece of real estate He means by listing the current Gentile residents. It is their land right now, but God is going to transfer complete and perpetual ownership to the physical descendants of Jacob in the day of the Messiah Jesus, i.e., when he returns (cf. Philippians 1:6).

In the last three verses of this passage, God commissions Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to this same mountain where He will meet with the entire group (and give them the Mosaic Covenant). He calls them “My people,” because He has promised to their patriarchs to make them a great nation. He also calls the “the sons of Israel,” because the twelve tribes can be identified by their ancestor, Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel when he wrestled with the human theophany at the River Jabbok in Genesis 32. Moses is not the most confident person in existence and questions God’s wisdom in choosing him for such a leadership role. God’s response of assurance in Moses’ succeeding in his task is the same that He gave to Isaac and Jacob, “Certainly I will be with you.” No one can fail in his God-assigned responsibility *if God is with him*—whether God has chosen someone to be the first Jew, i.e., Abraham, or to obtain a wife in Paddan-Aram, i.e., Jacob, or to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, i.e., Moses, or to believe in Jesus and obtain eternal life, i.e., all authentic Christians. This encouragement of God’s constant presence and faithfulness is for all God’s people of genuine faith down through the ages.

Exodus 6:1-9

6:1 Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land.”

6:2 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, “I am Yahweh;

6:3 and I appeared (וַיֵּאֲרָא) to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, Yahweh, I did not make Myself known to them.

6:4 “I also established My covenant with them (וַיִּסְמְךָ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם), to give them the land of Canaan (לְתַתָּ לָהֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן), the land in which they sojourned.

6:5 “Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.

6:6 “Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

6:7 ‘Then I will take you for My people (וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים); and I will be your God (וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים); and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

6:8 ‘I will bring you to the land (וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ) which I swore to give (אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-יְדֵי לְתַתָּ) to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession (וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לָכֶם מוֹרְשָׁה); I am Yahweh.”

6:9 So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage.

In Exodus 5, Moses and his brother Aaron, meet with Pharaoh and urge him to free the Israelites that they may worship their God in the wilderness. They know that this would also mean that the people will continue their journey to the land of Canaan to reclaim it according to God’s plans. But Pharaoh asks in Exodus 5:2, “Who is Yahweh that I should obey His voice...?” This is the same foolish question that all arrogant leaders ask who think that they are God. And Pharaoh is about to find out exactly who the Israelites’ God is—when He brings multiple disasters on his people, including the death of every firstborn son.

Exodus 6 begins with God basically saying to Moses, “I know that Pharaoh has refused to listen to you, but watch this. I am going to make him regret his denial of My request to the point that he will not be able to get rid of My people fast enough.” Then in vs. 2-3 God once more identifies himself to Moses as the one who “appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty [El Shaddai].” He

also tells Moses, “by My name, Yahweh, I did not make Myself known to them.” I think that what God means is that, even though the patriarchs addressed God as Yahweh, He wanted His main identity to be El Shaddai (God Almighty) to them. Thus, He was the chief of all possible gods to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the midst of Canaanites who were worshiping multiple gods, the forces of nature, that are controlled by the only true God, El Shaddai.

He goes on in v. 4 to remind Moses that He “established” a covenant with the patriarchs, “to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned.” This was part of God’s first promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, to be accompanied by their becoming a great nation. While Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived like nomads on the land, eventually their descendants will settle in it and prosper on it as the greatest nation in human history. God also reiterates in v. 5 that He has heard the groanings of His people in slavery in Egypt, and He has remembered the part of the covenant He made more explicit to Abraham in Genesis 15 that He would rescue them. Therefore, according to v. 6, Moses must say to his fellow Israelites that God will use all His transcendent power to display His judgment of the Egyptians for their cruel treatment of His people and rescue and free them from slavery.

In v. 7 God speaks with the beginnings of a formula that He will use throughout the rest of the Old Testament to describe His future relationship with the Jews when He fulfills His promise to make them a great nation, “I will be their God, and they will be My people.” Here, He says, “I will take you for My people, and I will be your God.” God is going to grab the Jews in Egypt and demonstrate that they are uniquely His earthly, chosen ethnic group. The result will be that the Israelites “will know that Yahweh is [their] God,” and the reason will be that He will have “brought [them] out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” In v. 8 God continues according to the Abrahamic Covenant, “I will bring you the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession.” We should note that in Genesis 17:8 God said to Abraham, “I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” Because Moses and these Israelites in Egypt are descendants of Abraham, it appears that God is now saying that He is fulfilling His promise to him. However, the rest of the story of Exodus through Numbers and the prophets of the Old Testament do not bear this out. Yes, God will miraculously lead the Israelites into the land of Canaan after their escape from Egypt, and they will take over the land from the indigenous peoples by killing many of them. But they will not completely possess it, and just as importantly they will not all become individuals of genuine faith and belief in God. Therefore, God here in Exodus 6 is pointing to the near future when the Jews will enter the land under Joshua’s leadership and displace many of the Canaanites, but He is not saying that He will be entirely fulfilling His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make them a great nation on the land—yet.

The passage ends in the next verse with Moses communicating God’s words to his fellow Jews, but they are too emotionally burdened by the cruel behavior of the Egyptians to be able to accept this “gospel,” the good news that God is going to rescue them from slavery and return them to the land of Canaan. It takes a miracle of God in the midst of difficult circumstances for people to believe God for His promises and encouragement. Eventually some of the Jews will believe God under Moses’ leadership, and all of them who remain after The Day of Yahweh will believe under Jesus’ leadership when he returns. It is the latter miracle that will truly be magnificent that we all are waiting for in the present world.

Exodus 32:1-14

32:1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

32:2 Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.”

32:3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

32:4 He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel (יְשׁוּרָאֵל), who brought you up from the land of Egypt.”

32:5 Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to Yahweh.”

32:6 So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

32:7 Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.

32:8 “They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’”

32:9 Yahweh said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people.

32:10 “Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation (וַאֲעֲשֶׂה אֶתְּךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל).”

32:11 Then Moses entreated Yahweh his God, and said, “Yahweh, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

32:12 “Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people (וַהֲנַחֲתָם עַל־הַרְעָה לְעַנְיָךָ).”

32:13 “Remember (זָכוֹר) Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself (אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לָהֶם בְּךָ), and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants (אֶת־זַרְעֲכֶם) as the stars of the heavens, and all this land (וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת) of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants (אֶתֶּן לְזַרְעֲכֶם), and they shall inherit it forever (וַיִּנְחַלְוּ לְעֹלָם).”

32:14 So Yahweh changed His mind about the harm (וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה עַל־הַרְעָה) which He said He would do to His people.

This is such a fascinating passage. Moses has been meeting with God for forty days on the top of Mt. Sinai, receiving a large collections of instructions and commandments from Him pertaining the Mosaic Covenant. But the rest of the Israelites have lost patience with him and considered him lost—perhaps for good. Having been immersed in the Egyptian culture for so long, they want to worship their God, Yahweh, but on their own terms which are pagan and idolatrous. So they ask Aaron, Moses’ brother, to fashion an idol for them, which he does from their gold jewelry. It is intriguing that they were willing to give up a large amount of their wealth in order to pursue their pagan goals in violation of the Mosaic Covenant. But such is the evil of human nature.

In addition, they hold a religious and celebratory feast in honor of their idol which Aaron has shaped into a “molten calf,” calling it Yahweh and claiming that it is the god “who brought [them] up from the land of Egypt.” The author also describes their behavior in v. 6, “They rose up early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” This probably means that they are putting a maximum effort into their idolatry, all the time thinking that they are doing the right thing for themselves—and for Yahweh, their God! But they are dead wrong, and God in His “burning anger” decides to execute them all and begin again with Moses so that He will “make of [him] a great nation.”

However, Moses intervenes on behalf of the Israelites, and He pleads with God as to the rightness of His proposal for two reasons that center in the Abrahamic Covenant. The first reason is that he warns God that the Egyptians will conclude that He rescued the people from slavery with the intent to do evil and destroy them. We recall in Exodus 6 that God commanded Moses to inform the Israelites that He was going to rescue them from their oppression and slavery in Egypt and bring them into the land of Canaan—

6:6 “Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

6:7 ‘Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

6:8 ‘I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am Yahweh.’”

The inference that we can draw from what God says (and what the Egyptians, who probably heard about these statements of God, would conclude) is that His intent was to bring *all the tribes* of Israel into the land which He had sworn to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But if God destroys the people in Exodus 32 and starts over with Moses, then only the tribe of Levi will be left. And how could not someone then decide that, “With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth” (cf. Exodus 32:12). Therefore, Moses is warning God that His reputation is on the line. He said He was going to be faithful to the Jews, and yet now He is threatening to abandon them and destroy them.

The second reason that Moses appeals to God to spare the Israelites is that He has promised and even sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to multiply their descendants “as the stars of the heavens” and to grant them the land of Canaan, in order that they may “inherit it forever,” i.e., ‘*ad ‘olam*, into perpetuity, which will be for as long as God wants in the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 after Jesus returns. While it may seem possible that God could fulfill His promise to Abraham by starting over with Moses because he and any descendants of his would also be descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who could also become as numerous “as the stars of heaven,” there must be something that Moses is implying that renders this conclusion wrong. I think that it is in the various affirmations of the covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God implies to all three men that, again, it will be the entire collection of twelve tribes of Jacob’s sons to whom God promises to make a great nation and to grant them the land of Canaan. God speaks to this effect in Exodus 6:4—

6:4 “I also established My covenant with them [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob], to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned.

Therefore, I think that we can say that every time God refers to the Abrahamic Covenant and His promise to the Jews to give them the land of Canaan and make them a great nation on the land, He has in mind all twelve tribes and their descendants. This is also in line with Jacob’s predictions to his sons in Genesis 49 before he dies, that they all have a future through their descendants, and specifically Judah as Jacob describes in vs. 8-12;

Genesis 49:1 Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, “Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come.

49:2 “Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob;
And listen to Israel your father...

49:8 “Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father’s sons shall bow down to you.

49:9 “Judah is a lion’s whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?

49:10 “The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,

And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

49:11 “He ties his foal to the vine,

And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.

49:12 "His eyes are dull from wine,
And his teeth white from milk."

Very simply, how can Judah's brothers, the rest of the tribes of Israel as Jacob predicts their futures too (that do not include being completely destroyed by God!), praise him if they no longer exist (cf. v. 8)? How can Judah rule the other tribes and the rest of the world if they and the other tribes have all disappeared—except for Levi, which is Moses' tribe (cf. v. 10)? Therefore, in Exodus 32, God is not ultimately planning to follow through on His threat to destroy the people. Instead, He is testing Moses. Is he arrogant and would leap at the opportunity to be the only Jew who is a patriarch to the future "great nation?" Or is he humble and even understands the details of the Abrahamic Covenant so that he rejects any hint that God would change His mind and not forgive His people for their idolatry? Clearly it is the latter, and Numbers 12:3 even says, "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth." As a result, Moses passes the test, and God changes His mind (so to speak), while the rest of the passage informs us that He also disciplines the people and three thousand of them die. Yet, He remains faithful to His promise to Abraham, to His promise to the Israelites in Exodus 6, and to Jacob's predictions according to this promise to preserve all the tribes and eventually make them a great nation on the land of Canaan.

Numbers 14:1-25

14:1 Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.

14:2 All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!

14:3 "Why is Yahweh bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

14:4 So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

14:5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel.

14:6 Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh,²¹ of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;

14:7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land.

14:8 "If Yahweh is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey.

14:9 "Only do not rebel against Yahweh; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and Yahweh is with us; do not fear them."

14:10 But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of Yahweh appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

14:11 Yahweh said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?

14:12 "I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them (וְאַזְרִינֵנִי), and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they (וְאַתְּשֶׁה אֶתְּךָ לְגוֹי-גָּדוֹל וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ)."

14:13 But Moses said to Yahweh, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst,

14:14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Yahweh, are in the midst of this people (בְּקִרְבֵּי הָעָם הַזֶּה), for You, Yahweh, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.

²¹ See Numbers 32:12 where Caleb's father Jephunneh is identified as a Kenizzite, and the Kenizzites were identified in Genesis 15:19 as Gentile Canaanites living on the land of Canaan, which God was giving to Abraham and his descendants.

14:15 “Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say,

14:16 ‘Because Yahweh could not (מִבְּלִיָּי יִכְלֶת יְהוָה) bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath (אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם), therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’

14:17 “But now, I pray, let the power of Yahweh be great, just as You have declared,

14:18 ‘Yahweh is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.’

14:19 “Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

14:20 So Yahweh said, “I have pardoned them according to your word;

14:21 but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of Yahweh

(וַיִּמְלֵא כְבוֹד-יְהוָה אֶת-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ).

14:22 “Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice,

14:23 shall by no means see the land (אֶת-הָאָרֶץ) which I swore to their fathers (אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאֲבוֹתָם), nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.”

14:24 “But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit (עֵקֶב הָיְתָה רוּחַ אַחֲרֵת עִמּוֹ) and has followed Me fully (וַיִּמְלֵא אַחֲרָי), I will bring into the land which he entered

(וַיֵּרְעוּ יוֹרְשָׁנָה), and his descendants shall take possession of it (וַהֲבִיאֹתֶיזוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרַךְ שְׁמִי).

14:25 “Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.”

This passage is basically the same as the previous one in Exodus 32. The Israelites have so angered God by their disobedience that He threatens to kill them all and start over with Moses, whom He claims in v. 12, “I will make into a nation greater and mightier than they.” This time God’s displeasure towards His people is because the spies (except for Joshua and Caleb), who have gone into Canaan to get the lay of the land before the people attack the Canaanites and destroy them, have brought back a discouraging report in Numbers 13. They have said the people are too strong and too tall to defeat (even though God has assured them that He will be with them and cause them to be victorious). So the people grumble against Moses and Aaron, decide to appoint a new leader and to return to Egypt. Joshua and Caleb plead with the Israelites to trust God for His faithfulness, but all they receive in return is the threat of being stoned to death. And then, in vs. 10-12, God appears to Moses and declares that He will destroy the people so that Moses and his descendants will become a great nation.

In vs. 13-16, Moses once again pleads with God as he did in Exodus 32 and reminds Him that His reputation is at stake. If He kills the people, then the Egyptians and surrounding nations will conclude that God was not powerful enough or loyal enough to “bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath; therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.” In other words, they will think that not only is God untrustworthy, but He is also weak. Moses then goes on to encourage God, that His “power...be great,” that He be “slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness [constant loyalty],” and that He “pardon...the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of [His] lovingkindness, just as [He] also [has] forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” Moses is telling God that this would not be the first time (and probably not the last, either) that He has had to forgive the Israelites and spare them in His anger during the journey from Egypt to Canaan. In addition, Moses realizes that it takes great strength and power to forgive people for their disobedience and immorality. This is true whether it is God who exercises His power of forgiveness or it is human beings who use their strength to forgive those who have transgressed against them. Forgiveness demonstrates moral power, and lack of forgiveness demonstrates moral weakness.

And in the case of God’s forgiveness of the Israelites, there is also the matter of His “lovingkindness,” the Hebrew word *hesed*, which means constant and faithful loyalty to the people and the promises which He has made them through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If God destroys the

Jews, then He is not constant and faithful to them. Therefore, He was lying to these three men and to their descendants, who are standing before Him and grumbling to high heaven, refusing to trust Him.

In vs. 20-23, God responds to Moses' plea and says that He will forgive the people, which means that He will not destroy them now. However, He states that this generation of adults who have tested Him ten times during the wilderness journey will not enter into the land He has promised them. They will die in the desert, and their children will inherit the land instead. God does not mention Joshua who remains steadfast in his faith in regard to God's making the Israelites victorious over the Canaanites, but He does refer to Caleb, probably to single him out as a Gentile who is trusting Him. God says, "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it" (v. 24). Caleb's "spirit," his heart and inwardness, is different from that of the rest of the people. God has circumcised and changed his heart so that Caleb is an authentic follower of Yahweh. He is believing God for all His promises. As a result, God uses the same word עָקַב (*ayqev*=because) that He based His decision to keep His promise and even swear an oath to do so to Abraham in Genesis 22:18, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because (עָקַב, *ayqev*) you have obeyed My voice." Thus, He is saying that Caleb will enter into the land and his descendants will inherit it along with the Jews. This is quite a statement by God, but it shows His faithfulness and loyalty to anyone of genuine faith and how He will share the blessing of being a great nation with any Gentiles who authentically attach themselves to Israel.

And I think that we can assume that at some point in the past Caleb's ancestors immigrated to Egypt and became bona fide followers of Yahweh with the Jews, so that he chose to leave Egypt with them under Moses' leadership. It is interesting also that when one man from each of the twelve tribes was chosen to go into the land and perform a thorough reconnaissance before the entire Israelite army invaded it, Caleb was chosen on behalf of Judah. Thus, a Gentile not only represented a Jewish tribe, but this was the tribe of the Messiah, the ruler whom Jacob predicted in Genesis 49. God is full of all sorts of surprises during the history of the Jews, even involving Gentiles when we might least expect them to play an important role that brings Israel closer to their goal of being a "great nation."

The final verse of this chapter is God's command to Moses to turn away from the land of Canaan and to head back out into the Sinai wilderness, where the Israelites will wander for forty years, waiting for the adult generation to die off so that their children may enter the land, conquer it, and take possession of it. I assume that this is rather discouraging news to Moses. He is on the verge of gaining the promised land himself and leading his people into it to conquer it, and now he must put up with them and their complaining for another forty years *in the desert*. But he still has the promise of eternal life that God made in Genesis 12:1-3 to Abraham and to anyone who imitates his faith. Plus, he probably has figured out that he will rise from the dead to participate in the "great nation" of Israel when it finally occurs sometime in the future. Therefore, he may be discouraged on the one hand, but rejoicing on the other hand.

Deuteronomy 4:1-40

4:1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession (לְמַעַן תִּחְיוּ וּבְאַתֶּם יִרְשׁוּתְּכֶם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ) of the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, is giving you (נֹתֵן לָכֶם).

4:2 "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep (לְשׂוּמֶר) the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you.

4:3 "Your eyes have seen what Yahweh has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, Yahweh your God has destroyed them from among you.

4:4 "But you who held fast to Yahweh your God are alive today, every one of you.

4:5 "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as Yahweh my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land (בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ) where you are entering to possess it (לְרִשְׁתָּהּ).

- 4:6 “So keep and do them (וְשִׁמְרֵתֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם), for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation (הַגֹּיִם הַגְּדוֹלִים הַזֶּה) is a wise and understanding people.’
- 4:7 “For what great nation (מִי־גוֹי גָּדוֹל) is there that has a god so near to it as is Yahweh our God whenever we call on Him?
- 4:8 “Or what great nation (וּמִי־גוֹי גָּדוֹל) is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?
- 4:9 “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently (רַב־בְּשׂוּמְרֵךְ לְךָ וּשְׁמֹר נַפְשְׁךָ מְאֹד), so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.
- 4:10 “Remember the day you stood before Yahweh your God at Horeb, when Yahweh said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth (עַל־הָאָרֶץ־זֶה), and that they may teach their children.’
- 4:11 “You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom.
- 4:12 “Then Yahweh spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form — only a voice.
- 4:13 “So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.
- 4:14 “Yahweh commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land (בְּאֶרֶץ) where you are going over to possess it (לְרִשְׁתָּהּ).
- 4:15 “So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire,
- 4:16 so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,
- 4:17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky,
- 4:18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth.
- 4:19 “And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which Yahweh your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.
- 4:20 “But Yahweh has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession (נַחֲלָה), as today.
- 4:21 “Now Yahweh was angry with me on your account, and swore that I would not cross the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land (אֶל־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה) which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance (נַחֲלָה לְךָ נַחֲלָה).
- 4:22 “For I will die in this land, I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession (וְרִשְׁתֶּם) of this good land (אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת).
- 4:23 “So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of Yahweh your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which Yahweh your God has commanded you.
- 4:24 “For Yahweh your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.
- 4:25 “When you become the father of children and children’s children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of Yahweh your God so as to provoke Him to anger,
- 4:26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land (מִעַל הָאָרֶץ) where you are going over the Jordan to possess it (לְרִשְׁתָּהּ). You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed.
- 4:27 “Yahweh will scatter (וְהַפִּיץ) you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where Yahweh drives you.²²

²² The Hebrew word וְהַפִּיץ (*ve haypheetz*) is from the verb פוּץ (*phutz* = scatter), which will show up many times to refer to God’s curse and discipline of the Jewish people for their disobedience. He will expel them from the land and scatter them to the

4:28 “There you will serve gods, the work of man’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.

4:29 “But from there you will seek Yahweh your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.

4:30 “When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return (בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים וְשָׁבַתָּ) to Yahweh your God and listen to His voice.

4:31 “For Yahweh your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them (וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח אֶת-בְּרִית אֲבוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם).

4:32 “Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it?

4:33 “Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived?

4:34 “Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

4:35 “To you it was shown that you might know that Yahweh, He is God; there is no other besides Him.

4:36 “Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire.

4:37 “Because He loved your fathers (וְנִחַתָּה בִּי אֱהַב אֶת-אֲבוֹתֶיךָ), therefore He chose their descendants after them (וַיִּבְחַר בְּבָנֶיךָ אַחֲרָיו). And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power,

4:38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land (לְהַבְרִיאָךָ לְתֵת לָךְ אֶת-אֲרָצָם) for an inheritance (נַחֲלָה), as it is today.

4:39 “Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that Yahweh, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.

4:40 “So you shall keep (וְשָׁמַרְתָּ) His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land (וְנִתְּן לָךְ כָּל-הַיָּמִים).”

Forty years have gone by since the Israelites turned away from the promised land and began their wanderings in the Sinai wilderness as discipline for their refusing to obey God and conquer the land of Canaan, because they were too afraid of the strength and height of the indigenous peoples. Now the next generation are poised on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, ready to possess the land which God has given to them, and in Deuteronomy (literally “second law/instruction” from the Greek *deuteros* = second and *nomos* = law, instruction) Moses presents his final exhortation and summary of the Mosaic Covenant to them.

In Deuteronomy 4:1, he reiterates God’s promise to Abraham and says, “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, is giving you.” These are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were their “fathers,” and God is placing a condition on them in order for them to enter the land, possess it, and live on it. They must perform (literally “do”) the Mosaic Covenant. In v. 2, the Israelites are not to add anything to or subtract anything from the covenant, but they are to keep (literally “guard”) it. They have watched God discipline them several times, including killing 24,000 of them by a plague who worshiped the false god, Baal-peor (cf. Numbers 25:1-9). Because this group continued to believe and obey God, they survived God’s discipline of their fellow Jews (v. 4).

In vs. 6-8 of Deuteronomy 4, Moses instructs them that they are to be a beacon of the light of truth to the surrounding pagan and Gentile nations. These will observe their moral behavior and consider them to be wise and understanding as a “great nation.” I think that God is making clearer

four corners of the world, only to gather them back into the land at a much later time to fulfill His promise to Abraham to make them a “great nation.”

what He meant in Exodus 19:5-6 when He was giving the Mosaic Covenant to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, “5 Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” God’s intended role for Israel has always been for them to teach the rest of the world about Him—through their words and actions that are in accord with His commandments in the Mosaic Covenant, whether the moral or ritual or civil commandments. However, the remaining history of the Jews reveals that this will not happen until God fulfills His promise to them some time future to us when Jesus returns, and they all become authentic in their faith in God and Jesus so that they follow the Mosaic Covenant the way He always had hoped that they would. When Jesus restores the Kingdom of Israel at his return, the remnant of Jews after His discipline of them during The Day of Yahweh will all finally become the kind of people who instruct and teach about God in a correct and truthful way the Gentile nations during the millennial kingdom. And we will learn from the prophetic books of the Old Testament that some of the Gentiles will take heed of their instruction and wisdom and will themselves become followers of Yahweh and Jesus in order to acquire eternal forgiveness and life.

Then, in vs. 9-20, Moses issues a series of warnings to the people. The first is in v. 9, “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.” The Israelites must take care that their inward spiritual well-being is maintained throughout their entire lives. And they must teach their children all that God has instructed them in the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants so that each generation after them learns who God is and obeys Him, thus being a “nation of priests” who are a light of truth to the world. The second warning is in vs. 10-20 where Moses reminds the people that God met with them at Mt. Horeb and gave them the Ten Commandments along with the rest of the Mosaic Covenant. And they did not see Him because He did not appear to them in any form. Therefore, they should never think that they can make an image (such as a golden calf! – cf. Exodus 32) which represents Him and before which they should bow down and worship. Neither should they look to the heavens and worship the stars as if these somehow fully represent their transcendent creator or the ultimate forces in their lives. The only way they know how to understand God is from His words, and it is to these they should always pay attention and guard with their minds and hearts, because God has made them His possession. As the apostle Paul says in Romans 3:1-2, the most important advantage that the Jews gained over other peoples is “that they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (along with being chosen by God to become the most powerful and wisest nation in human history).

In vs. 21-22, Moses also reminds the Israelites that he will not be entering into the land of Canaan, because God became angry with him when he struck the rock instead of only speaking to it for water to emerge from it for the people when they were thirsty (cf. Numbers 20:1-13). But as I mentioned before, at least he has the promise of eternal life to offset his disappointment in not being allowed to enter the land that God had promised to him just as much as He had promised it to Abraham and his descendants. Moses will step foot on it when God raises him from the dead at Jesus’ return and transforms him into an immortal being like all deceased believers.

Moses goes on with an additional warning in vs. 23-31. When the Israelites take possession of the land and in the future choose to worship pagan gods or make an idol of God, He will discipline them by expelling them from the land and scattering them among the surrounding nations, where they will worship the gods of those lands. Nevertheless, “in the latter days,” they will eventually seek God and return to Him with their hearts and souls. And Moses states the reason that this will happen, “For Yahweh your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them” (cf. v. 31). Because God has promised in Genesis 12, has guaranteed in Genesis 15, and has sworn in Genesis 22 to make the Jews a great nation of authentic believers living on the land of Israel, even their idolatry and being expelled from the land will not prevent Him from causing this to happen.

Then in vs. 32-36, Moses encourages the people to ask themselves who has heard the voice of the transcendent creator the way they have and survived? What God has used plagues with His great power to rescue a people from another nation? It is to them that God has demonstrated His great strength and presence, and it is to them that He has spoken and given the Mosaic Covenant. And Moses continues with another reiteration of the Abrahamic Covenant, “37 Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today” (Deuteronomy 4:37-38). These Israelites stand poised on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, ready to invade and possess the land of Canaan, because of God’s love for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the covenant He made with them—that they would have descendants to whom He would give the land.

The final two verses of this passage are exhortations by Moses to the people. First in v. 39, “Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that Yahweh, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.” The Jews are strict monotheists, unlike the other peoples of the Ancient Near East, and God requires that they remain such throughout their entire history. The second exhortation is in v. 40, “So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which Yahweh your God is giving you for all time.” Because God is their God, the people are required to keep, i.e., guard in their minds and hearts, all His instructions and commandments. And if they do, they will live prosperously and safely on the land of Israel, which God is giving them “for all time” (literally “all the days”). This phrase means “always” (as it is sometimes translated) and the same thing as *‘ad ‘olam* (for as long as God wants until the end of this age). Therefore, Moses’ exhortations will not find their complete fulfillment until Jesus returns and rules over the “great nation” of Israel during the millennial kingdom (cf. Revelation 20).

Deuteronomy 7:1-16

7:1 “When Yahweh your God brings you into the land (אֶל-הָאָרֶץ) where you are entering to possess it (לְרִשְׁתָּהּ), and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you,

7:2 and when Yahweh your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.

7:3 “Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.

7:4 “For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of Yahweh will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.

7:5 “But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire.

7:6 “For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession (סְגֻלָּה) out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

7:7 “Yahweh did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

7:8 but because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers (וּמִשְׁמֵר וְאֶת-הַשְּׁבָעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם), Yahweh brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

7:9 “Know therefore that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God (הַאֱלֹהִים הַנֶּאֱמָן), who keeps (שֹׁמֵר) His covenant and His lovingkindness (שֶׁמֶר הַבְּרִית וְחַסְדֹּ) to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments (לְאַהֲבָיו וְלִשְׁמְרֵי מִצְוָתוֹ);

7:10 but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face.

7:11 “Therefore, you shall keep (וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם) the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them.

7:12 “Then it shall come about, because (עַקֵּב) you listen to these judgments and keep and do them (וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם), that Yahweh your God will keep (וּשְׁמַר) with you His covenant and His lovingkindness (וּשְׁמֵר יְהוָה אֶלְטֵיְדֶיךָ לְךָ אֶת־הַבְּרִית וְאֶת־הַחֶסֶד) which He swore to your forefathers (אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתֵּיךָ).

7:13 “He will love you and bless you and multiply you (וַיִּרְבֶּךָ וַיְהַרְבֶּךָ וַיְבָרֶכְךָ); He will also bless (וַיְבָרֶכְךָ) the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock, in the land (עַל הָאָרֶץ) which He swore to your forefathers to give you (אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתֵּיךָ לָתֶת לָךְ).

7:14 “You shall be blessed (בָּרֻךְ תִּהְיֶה) above all peoples; there will be no male or female barren among you or among your cattle.

7:15 “Yahweh will remove from you all sickness; and He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known, but He will lay them on all who hate you.

7:16 “You shall consume all the peoples (וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הָעַמִּים) whom Yahweh your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, nor shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.”

Three chapters later, Moses provides the Israelites with instructions on how they should treat the Canaanites when they enter the land to conquer it. First, he reminds that they are going to be fighting against “seven nations greater and stronger than” they are (v. 1). This is what so frightened their fathers that they refused to obey God and enter into the land and fight them. But this previous generation has died, and now Moses is addressing their sons. Yet, he has no problem stating the truth, that on paper (so to speak) the Canaanites look “greater and stronger than” they are. Nevertheless, God will “deliver them” into their hands so that they will “defeat” them. Therefore, His instructions through Moses is that the people of Israel “shall utterly destroy them” and “make no covenant with them and show no favor to them” (v. 2). In addition, they are not to intermarry with the Canaanites, lest they be led astray from obeying only Yahweh to worshiping these Gentiles’ false gods. As a result, the Israelites must destroy all the places and tools of worship that the Canaanites have used to pay homage to their idols.

In vs. 6-8, Moses states the reason why the Jews are required to follow these instructions, “6 For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 Yahweh did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, Yahweh brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” The bottom line for the Israelites’ obedience and God’s faithfulness is His covenant, which He swore to keep with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God has literally “set His love” on the nation of Israel, not because they were so impressive in their huge population, because they are (and continue to be) but a small ethnic group in the world. But God has loved and continues to love the Jewish people *simply because He has chosen to do so of His own free-will and sovereignty*. And Moses is saying that the greatest demonstration in Israel’s history so far of God’s constant faithfulness and commitment to them is His powerfully rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. This has been their Alamo, or their Bunker Hill, or their Battle of Midway, or their 9/11, to remember and boost their confidence so as to remind themselves that God is their God and they are His people, while persisting in their looking forward to becoming the greatest nation in all history. “Never forget the Exodus!!” is what Moses is telling them.

Then Moses commands the people in vs. 9-10 to know and, therefore, never forget that Yahweh is *their* God, and that He guards His covenant and lovingkindness (His *hesed* = loyal and constant love and commitment) far into the future. Indeed, I think that God is referring ultimately to the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20. In spite of all future acts of disobedience by the Jews (and there will be many), *their* God will not abandon them, and many generations after them (“thousandth”

being hyperbole) will experience His constant love and devotion. In contrast, God will execute His justice, condemnation, and eternal destruction towards all those, Jews and Gentiles, “who hate Him” and rebel against Him during their lives.

Moses proceeds to make it clear in vs. 11-12 that, if the Israelites fulfill the condition which God has placed on them, and they “11 keep [guard in their hearts and minds] the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them, 12 then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that Yahweh your God will keep with you [guard in His heart and mind] His covenant and His lovingkindness, which He swore to your forefathers.” Thus, as v. 12 demonstrates, the Jews’ meeting the condition of the Mosaic Covenant is merely the flip side of the coin, which contains on the other side of God’s promise, guarantee, and oath that He will make sure that they do so.

And as a result of God’s *hesed* (“lovingkindness” – v. 12) towards the Jews and the Jews’ obedience towards Him, God will “bless” them with abundance of people, food, cattle, wealth, and health, and this will be “above all peoples.” Indeed, God will lay the “diseases of Egypt” on their enemies (vs. 13-15). This is how high above all other peoples the Jews will be. And the passage ends in v. 16 with Moses saying, “You shall consume all the peoples whom Yahweh your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, nor shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.” When these Israelites to whom Moses is speaking enter the land of the Canaanites, they are to conquer them to the full extent that they destroy them all completely. This means that the potential is there for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham and to make this generation of Israelites the great nation. In fact, the rest of the Old Testament indicates that the potential is always there as God appeals to each generation of Jews to obey Him and the Mosaic Covenant with completely changed hearts. But, as Moses has already said in Deuteronomy 4:30, it will not be until “the latter days” that this will happen, which we also learn from the rest of the Bible is when Jesus returns, the time that the prophets will call “The Day of the Lord [Yahweh].”

Deuteronomy 26:1-19

26:1 “Then it shall be, when you enter the land (כִּי־תָבוֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ) which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance (נַחֲלָה לְךָ נָתַתִּי), and you possess it (וַיִּרְשָׁתָהּ) and live in it,

26:2 that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land (מִמְאֲדָתְךָ) that Yahweh your God gives you (נָתַתִּי לְךָ), and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where Yahweh your God chooses to establish His name.

26:3 “You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘I declare this day to Yahweh my God that I have entered the land (כִּי־בָאתִי אֶל־הָאָרֶץ) which Yahweh swore to our fathers to give us (אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ לָתֶת לָנוּ).”

26:4 “Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of Yahweh your God.

26:5 “You shall answer and say before Yahweh your God, ‘My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation (לְנֹפֵי גְדוֹל עַמּוּם רַב).

26:6 ‘And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us.

26:7 ‘Then we cried to Yahweh, the God of our fathers, and Yahweh heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression;

26:8 and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders;

26:9 and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land (וַיַּבְרֵךְ לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת), a land flowing with milk and honey.

26:10 ‘Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, Yahweh have given me (אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּה לִי יְהוָה).’ And you shall set it down before Yahweh your God, and worship before Yahweh your God;

26:11 and you and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which Yahweh your God has given you (גִּתְךָ־לְךָ) and your household.

26:12 “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it (וְנִתְּתָהּ) to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

26:13 “You shall say before Yahweh your God, ‘I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it (נִתְּתִינוּ) to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.

26:14 ‘I have not eaten of it while mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor offered any of it to the dead. I have listened to the voice of Yahweh my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me.

26:15 ‘Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground (וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ) which You have given us (וְאֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּה־לָּנוּ), a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers (כַּאֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ).’

26:16 “This day Yahweh your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul.

26:17 “You have today declared Yahweh to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep (וְלִשְׁמֹר) His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice.

26:18 “Yahweh has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession (סִגְיָה), as He promised you, and that you should keep (וְלִשְׁמֹר) all His commandments;

26:19 and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor (וְלִתְהַדָּתְךָ עָלְיוֹן עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְתַהֲלִילָה וְלִשְׂמָה וְלִתְהַפְאֵרָה); and that you shall be a consecrated people (עַם־קִדְשׁ) to Yahweh your God, as He has spoken.”

Chapter 26 of Deuteronomy provides instructions from Moses of an important religious ceremony which the people of Israel must perform once they enter the land of Canaan and take possession of it. Thus, they will demonstrate to Yahweh their gratitude for all that He has done for them and given them since the day He called Abraham, gave him the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, and brought his descendants into the land after their long sojourn in Egypt. According to vs. 2-4, they are to take the first of the produce of the land, put it in a basket, and carry it to the place where “God chooses to establish His name” and present it to the priest on duty. Then each Israelite will say, “I declare this day to Yahweh my God that I have entered the land which Yahweh swore to our fathers to give us,” i.e., to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Them, in line with vs. 5-11, each Israelite will recount his history, that his ancestor Abraham never really settled in the land, that his descendants ended up in Egypt in slavery, and that God rescued them from their oppression and brought them into the land of Canaan which provides abundant food for His people. As a result, each Israelite will demonstrate his gratitude and worship of God and rejoice with the priest and any foreigners who have joined the Israelites in serving God on the land which He has given them. They will all do so together, according to vs. 12-14, each third year when the people perform this ceremony and present their tithe, the “sacred portion” of their food, to the priest, while also sharing it with any foreigner, widow, or orphan who is in need. This will all be in obedience to the commandment of God for the Israelites as they live under the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, they will be acknowledging that they are obeying it. They will also say to God, “I have not eaten of it while mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor offered any of it to the dead. I have listened to the voice of Yahweh my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me” (v. 14). In other words, they themselves have not eaten the tithe and used some situation of sadness as an excuse. Nor have they offered their tithe while being ritualistic unclean. Nor have they imitated the Gentile nations and offered their tithe of food to their deceased ancestors. Truly, they have followed God’s instructions completely.

And they will pray to God, “Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground which You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You

swore to our fathers” (v. 15). In this way they will be reminding God and themselves of the Abrahamic Covenant, that He has promised to make them a great and prosperous nation on the land of Canaan which He has given them. Indeed, God swore an oath to Abraham in Genesis 22 that He would keep His covenant with him and his descendants. And by blessing His people with food, God will provide what they need to perform this religious ceremony of tithing every third year.

In v. 16, Moses informs the Israelites, “This day Yahweh your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul.” In other words, they should be people of authentic faith with an inwardness that it is oriented towards God. And Moses also reminds them in v. 17, “You have today declared Yahweh to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice.” By listening to Moses and taking to heart what he is saying, the Israelites have basically stated, “Yahweh is our God, and we will obey Him as He has required of us and fulfill the condition of the covenant.” But God will also relate to them in a reciprocal manner. In v. 18, Moses says, “Yahweh has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments.” Through Moses, God is likewise stating, “You, the Israelites, are My people, and I will remain faithful and committed to you to fulfill My promise to Abraham to make you a great nation.”

Therefore, in v. 19, Moses finishes by telling the people, “[Yahweh] will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to Yahweh your God, as He has spoken.” This is another way of saying, that by their fulfilling the condition of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants and believing God with genuine faith and pursuing obedience to all His commandments, God will respond by fulfilling His promise to make them the greatest nation in human history. Israel will be special people, God’s own possession, and they will acquire praise and fame and honor higher than any other nation in history. However, we find out from the rest of the Bible that this will not occur during this generation’s lifetime after they have conquered the Canaanites. Instead, it will happen when Jesus returns and restores the Kingdom of Israel as described in the prophetic books of the Old Testament and in Revelation 19 and 20.

Deuteronomy 28:1-2; 7-14; 15; 25; 43-46

28:1 “Now it shall be, if you diligently obey (אם־שָׁמַרְתָּ תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל) Yahweh your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, Yahweh your God will set you high above (וַיִּנְתְּנֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עָלֵינוּ) all the nations of the earth.

28:2 “All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey Yahweh your God (כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל)...”

28:7 “Yahweh shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways.

28:8 “Yahweh will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you (וַיְבָרֶכְךָ) in the land (בְּאֶרֶץ) which Yahweh your God gives you (לְךָ).

28:9 “Yahweh will establish you (וַיִּקְיֶמְךָ) as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you (בְּאִשְׁרֵי נִשְׁבַּע לְךָ), if you keep (כִּי תִשְׁמַר) the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in His ways.

28:10 “So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of Yahweh, and they will be afraid of you.

28:11 “Yahweh will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land (עַל הָאָרֶץ) which Yahweh swore to your fathers to give you (אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאֲבוֹתֶיךָ לָתֵת לְךָ).

28:12 “Yahweh will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land (אֶרֶץ) in its season and to bless (וַיְבָרֶכְךָ) all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

28:13 “Yahweh will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if (כִּי) you listen to the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully,

28:14 and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

28:15 “But it shall come about, if (אם) you do not obey Yahweh your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you...”

28:25 “Yahweh shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.”

28:43 “The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower.

28:44 “He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail.”

28:45 “So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because (כִּי) you would not obey Yahweh your God by keeping (לְשִׁמְרָה) His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you.

28:46 “They shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever (בְּיָמֵי עַד-עוֹלָמְךָ).

In Deuteronomy 28, Moses lays out the consequences for obeying the covenant and for disobeying it. Verses 1-14, he states the *blessings* of obeying the Mosaic Covenant, while vs. 15-68 list the *curses* of disobeying it. We notice in vs. 1-2 and 7-14 as quoted above that these are a more detailed description of God’s promise to Abraham to make his descendants a great nation. If the Israelites will obey this covenant with diligence and care, i.e., from hearts that are truly oriented towards God, then He will “set [them] high above all the nations on the earth.” In other words, they will become the strongest and most powerful people in human history. As a result, they will defeat their enemies with ease as v. 7 states.

In addition, vs. 8-12 combine the ideas that Israel will be prosperous on their land so that they will lend to other nations and never borrow from them, and that they will strike fear into the hearts of their enemies. Moses says in vs. 13-14 that this means, “**13** “Yahweh will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully, **14** and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.” Rather than the Gentile nations’ wagging the Jews like the tail of dog and dominating them, the Jews will rule over and exercise hegemony over the Gentiles. Of course, this will be unlike most of their history, where it was really only during the time of King David and King Solomon that the nation of Israel was independent and strong, even if they did not rule over the surrounding Gentile peoples. However, as always, there is a condition which the Jews must fulfill. They must genuinely obey the Mosaic Covenant. And this will happen only when God changes the hearts of each and every one of them who is still living after The Day of the Lord, as we will learn from the prophets, Isaiah through Malachi.

In vs. 15, 25, and 43-46, Moses speaks some very harsh words to his Jewish listeners such as in v. 25, “Yahweh shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.” He also says in vs. 43-44, “**43** The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. **44** He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail.” But the harshest words are in vs. 45-46, “**45** So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are

destroyed, because you would not obey Yahweh your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. 46 They shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever.”

These last two verses make it sound as though there is the possibility that God will completely abandon the Jews and even destroy them entirely if they disobey Him. But we have already seen two instances in Exodus 32 and Numbers 14 where God threatens to do just exactly this and relents. Why? Because of His *hesed*! Because of His constant and perpetual love and faithfulness to Abraham’s physical descendants to make them a great nation! Therefore, it makes no sense to think that means in vs. 45-46 that He will completely destroy the Israelites and abandon them if they disobey the Mosaic Covenant. Neither does it make any sense that He would abandon the nation of Israel and transfer their promises to the Church, who believe in Jesus—as some Christians would interpret this passage. God means, instead, that He will expel Jews from their land and scatter them throughout the Gentile nations so that they are no longer their own nation on the land of Israel. However, in spite of the Hebrew words *‘ad ‘olam* at the end of v. 46, which get translated “forever,” God means “into perpetuity,” which is to say, for as long as He wants, which will be until He decides to fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and bring the Jews back into the land and change their inwardness so that they genuinely obey Him. And this we will learn will coincide with Jesus’ return.

Deuteronomy 29-30

29:1 These are the words of the covenant which Yahweh commanded Moses to make (לְכַרְתֹּת) with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides (מִלְּבַד) the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.

29:2 And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “You have seen all that Yahweh did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land;

29:3 the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders.

29:4 “Yet to this day Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.

29:5 “I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot.

29:6 “You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or strong drink, in order that you might know that I am Yahweh your God.

29:7 “When you reached this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us for battle, but we defeated them;

29:8 and we took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites.

29:9 “So keep (וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם) the words of this covenant to do them, that you may prosper (לְמַעַן תִּשְׁכַּלְיוּ) in all that you do.

29:10 “You stand today, all of you, before Yahweh your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel (כָּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל),

29:11 your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water,

29:12 that you may enter into (לְעִבְדֶיךָ) the covenant with Yahweh your God, and into His oath (וּבְאִלְתּוֹ) which Yahweh your God is making (כֹּרֶת) with you today,

29:13 in order that He may establish you (לְמַעַן יִקְיַם אֱלֹהֶיךָ) today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore (נִשְׁבַּע) to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

29:14 “Now not with you alone am I making (אֲנֹכִי כֹרֶת) this covenant and this oath (וְאִתְּהֶאֱלֵה הַיּוֹמָה),

29:15 but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of Yahweh our God and with those who are not with us here today

29:16 (for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed;

29:17 moreover, you have seen their abominations and their idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which they had with them);

29:18 so that there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from Yahweh our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.

29:19 "It shall be when he hears the words of this curse, that he will boast, saying, 'I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land with the dry.'

29:20 "Yahweh shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of Yahweh and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and Yahweh will blot out his name from under heaven.

29:21 "Then Yahweh will single him out for adversity from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant which are written in this book of the law.

29:22 "Now the generation to come, your sons who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, when they see the plagues of the land and the diseases with which Yahweh has afflicted it, will say,

29:23 'All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which Yahweh overthrew in His anger and in His wrath.'

29:24 "All the nations will say, 'Why has Yahweh done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?'

29:25 "Then men will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.

29:26 'They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them.

29:27 'Therefore, the anger of Yahweh burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book;

29:28 and Yahweh uprooted them from their land (וַיִּשְׁמַד יְהוָה מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָם) in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land (אֶל-אֶרֶץ אַחֲרָה), as it is this day.'

29:29 "The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

30:1 "So it shall be when (כִּי) all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind (וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם) in all nations where Yahweh your God has banished you,

30:2 and you return (וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם) to Yahweh your God and obey (וַיִּשְׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹלוֹ) Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons,

30:3 then Yahweh your God will restore you (וַיִּשָּׁב יְהוָה אֶלְתֵּיךָ) from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you (וַיִּשָּׁב וַיִּקְבְּצֶךָ) again from all the peoples where Yahweh your God has scattered you.²³

30:4 "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth [heavens] (אִם-יִהְיֶה גְדֻמְתְּךָ בְּקִצְתָהּ הַשָּׁמַיִם), from there Yahweh your God will gather you (וַיִּקְבְּצֶךָ), and from there He will bring you back.

30:5 "Yahweh your God will bring you into the land (אֶל-הָאָרֶץ) which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it (וַיִּירְשֶׁתָּהּ); and He will prosper you (וַיְהַיִּטְבֶּךָ) and multiply you (וַיְהַרְבֶּךָ) more than your fathers.

30:6 "Moreover Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart (וַיִּמְלֵךְ יְהוָה אֶלְתֵּיךָ אֶת-לִבְבְּךָ) and the heart of your descendants (וַיְרַעְמֶךָ), to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live (לְיִמְעַן תִּיָּיֶה).

30:7 " And Yahweh your God will inflict (וַיִּנְתֵּן יְהוָה אֶלְתֵּיךָ) all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you.

30:8 "And you shall again obey Yahweh, and observe all His commandments which I command you today.

²³ The Hebrew word **וַיִּקְבְּצֶךָ** (*ve qibbetzka* = and he will gather you) is from the verb **קָבַץ** (*qavatz* = gather), which will appear many times in the Old Testament prophets to refer to God's fulfilling His promise to Abraham to bring his descendants back into the land of Israel where they will become the greatest nation in human history.

30:9 “Then Yahweh your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for Yahweh will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers;

30:10 if (כִּי) you obey Yahweh your God to keep (לְשַׁמֵּר) His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn (כִּי תָשׁוּב) to Yahweh your God with all your heart and soul (בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ).

30:11 “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.

30:12 “It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’

30:13 “Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’

30:14 “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

30:15 “See, I have set before you (נִתְּנָה לְפָנֶיךָ) today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;

30:16 in that I command you today to love Yahweh your God, to walk in His ways and to keep (וְלִשְׁמֹר) His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply (וְרַבִּיתָ וְרַבִּיתָ), and that Yahweh your God may bless you (וַיְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ) in the land (בְּאֶרֶץ) where you are entering to possess it (לְרִשְׁתָּהּ).

30:17 “But if your heart turns away (וְאַם-יִפְגַּה לְבָבְךָ) and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them,

30:18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land (עַל-הַיַּרְדֵּן) where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it (לְרִשְׁתָּהּ).

30:19 “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you (תָּתִי לְפָנֶיךָ) life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants (לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה אַתָּה וְיִרְעֶה),

30:20 by loving (לְאַהֲבָה) Yahweh your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land (עַל-הָאָרֶץ) which Yahweh swore (נִשְׁבַּע) to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them (לָתֵת לָהֶם).”

I think that this is one of the most helpful passages in the Old Testament. Moses is in the process of ending his sermon, which is a restatement of the Mosaic Covenant, and here he reveals some key elements about both the Jews who are listening to him in his own day and the Jews who will exist far into the future at the end of the present realm. And the ideas that he expresses come from the past, from the Abrahamic Covenant and the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and will show up in the future when the prophets add their words to Israel’s history and also when the New Testament adds its words to their history.

First, in vs. 2-3, Moses reminds the Israelites that they saw with their own eyes what God did when He rescued them from slavery and how He made the Egyptians suffer with the “great signs and wonders” of the plagues and the death of the firstborn in each household. And then in v. 4 he makes a very revealing theological statement, “Yet to this day Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.” We will see in the prophets that part of what it will mean for Abraham’s descendants to be the “great nation” of Genesis 12:2 is that each and every Jew living on the land of Israel will be a sinner with a heart that has been changed by the Spirit of God. And this will be the first and only time in Israel’s history when this will be the case. During the rest of the Jews’ history, some of the Jews are authentic believers in Yahweh (and in Jesus, too, after his first appearance), but most of them are not. And Moses is explicitly stating to his listeners, who currently comprise the nation of Israel, that God has not given each and every one of them a heart that exhibits genuine faith and that properly understands all that is possible to know about Him at this time. The upshot of this is that they will enter the land as a mixed group and take it over from the Canaanites. Some of them are authentic believers with changed hearts, and some of them are not—because this is just the way God

wants things to be at this time in their history. He is the one who is in sovereign control of all reality, and He will decide at what point in the future that His Spirit will change all the living Jews' hearts.

In vs. 5-6 God Himself speaks, “5 I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot. 6 You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or strong drink, in order that you might know that I am Yahweh your God.” In other words, there has been plenty of evidence during the last forty years that God is alive and faithful towards His people Israel, and everyone should take note of this. Then Moses continues in vs. 7-8 to provide more evidence of God's *hesed*. The Israelites had defeated the two kings, Sihon and Og, and their people, and their land had been given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and to half of the tribe of Manasseh. With all the data that points to God's constant love and commitment, Moses exhorts his listeners in v. 9 to guard the “words of this covenant to do them,” so that they may prosper during their lives on the land of Canaan. But, again, we know that this will not fully happen until the end of history when all remaining Jews become authentic believers in God and in Jesus the Messiah.

Moses also tells the people in vs. 10-13 that God is making a covenant with all of them today, including with any foreigners who have chosen to join them and are living among them, as well as with any servants they have who are also worshiping their God. Indeed, this is an “oath” which Yahweh is making with them, in order to “establish” them this day as His people, so that He may be their God. And this is “just as He spoke to [them] and as He swore to [their] fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Thus God reiterates the Abrahamic Covenant to this generation of Jews four to five hundred years later.

In vs. 14-15, Moses speaks about the longevity of the Mosaic Covenant, “14 Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, 15 but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of Yahweh our God and with those who are not with us here today.” I think that he is declaring that the covenant exists for as long as the Jews exist, which will be through the time that God fulfills His promise to make them a great nation. This is to say that they always have a national obligation to follow this covenant. But we will see that it is only possible for them to do so in a completely obedient manner when they are living securely on their land and are all of them people whose hearts have been changed by the Spirit of God.

And Moses warns the Jews in vs. 16-21 that if any individual among them chooses to turn away from God in his heart and arrogantly believes that he can reject God's commandments and live his life any way he wants, that God will “never be willing to forgive him.” We can see that this is describing an abject unbelieving Jew just as it describes a Gentile who is a complete unbeliever. Any sinful human being who refuses to love, worship, and obey God will never be forgiven by Him. And “Yahweh will blot out his name from under heaven,” meaning that He will eventually condemn and destroy him for all eternity. God will also bring the curses of this covenant on him, which Moses spoke of in chapter 28 and prophets and the book of Revelation will confirm.

In vs. 22-28, Moses explains that future generations of Jews and any foreigners, who have the opportunity to see the land of Canaan [Israel] after God has disciplined the nation of Israel because so many Jews have proven to be like the individual described in vs. 16-21, will be dismayed at what they see—a land that has been devastated “like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah” in God's “anger and wrath.” “All the nations” will ask why this is happened, and the answer they will receive will be, “25...Because [God's people, the Jews] forsook the covenant of Yahweh, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. 26 They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. 27 Therefore, the anger of Yahweh burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book [cf. Deuteronomy 28:15-68]; 28 and Yahweh uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.”

Moses ends chapter 29 in v. 29, “The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.” He is saying that no Jew has any excuse not to obey the Mosaic Covenant properly. God, through him, has made it abundantly clear what are the consequences for disobedience and obedience. If they reject the

covenant, God will reject them, and He will expel them from the land and deny them eternal life. If they embrace the covenant, they will become the great nation of Genesis 12:2. These are “the things revealed” that “belong to [the Jews] and to [their] sons forever, so that [they are required to] observe all the words of this law.” Certainly there is a lot about the nature of reality that we human beings do not know and therefore are the “secret things” which “belong to Yahweh” and to no one else. But no Jew can say, “God, I never knew what you wanted me to do to obey You.” As the apostle Paul says in Romans 3:2, “They [the Jews!] were entrusted with the oracles of God” and are constantly supposed to teach themselves and the rest of the world what God is doing with this story that He is telling and what He requires of sinners in order to escape His eternal wrath and condemnation.

After the stern and sobering warning of chapter 29, Moses moves on in the next chapter to words of incredible encouragement to the nation of Israel. I think that this whole chapter is one of the most important in the Bible because it looks back to the combination of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, and it looks forward to their fulfillment in spite of the Jews’ disobedience to God. Moses begins in v. 1, “So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where Yahweh your God has banished you...” It seems to me that he is not just saying “when,” but he is also saying “that.” In other words, whenever God decides according to His constant love and commitment to the Jews, that both the blessing and the curse of the Mosaic Covenant are to occur in the lives of the Jews, and He has expelled them from their land and they are living in foreign lands, that eventually they will think long and hard about what this covenant is all about. Then he continues in v. 2, “and you return to Yahweh your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons...” The word “return” is the Hebrew *shoov*, which means to turn or return, indicating that Moses is saying that when the people finally fulfill the condition which God is placing on them in the Mosaic Covenant, they will change their minds, their hearts, and their very existences from people who disobey God to those who authentically obey Him “with all [their] heart and soul according to” God’s commandments.

The result will be as stated in v. 3, “then Yahweh your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where Yahweh your God has scattered you.” The words “restore” and “again” in this verse are also *shoov*, meaning that as the people change towards God, God will change towards them and return to being their God and bring them back into the land of Israel from wherever He has scattered them when He cursed and disciplined them for their disobedience. And v. 4 is very encouraging too, “If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there Yahweh your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back.” The word translated “earth” is actually the Hebrew word for “heavens.” Moses is using hyperbole to say that the Jews may have been exiled from their land to the far reaches of the universe, but this is no problem for God to grab them and transport them to the land of Israel. This is how committed He will be to demonstrate that they are His people who have the right to dwell on this land He has given them. Indeed, “Yahweh your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers” (cf. v. 5). Here Moses refers to God’s fulfilling His promise of Genesis 12:2 to make Abraham’s descendants a “great nation.” When God blesses them and restores them to their land, He will also ensure that they prosper on it from that time forward. Literally, He will cause them to be good—in all their activity and its effects. And they will become a very populous and enduring people. This will be for the many generations of the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20.

Then in v. 6 Moses describes how God is going to change the people of Israel inwardly so that they love God with all their being, “Moreover Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” The word “Moreover” is just one Hebrew letter that basically means “And.” Thus Moses is saying that all that the Jews will do that results in their fulfilling the condition of the covenant will begin with God’s work within them. In Deuteronomy 10:16, he gave the commandment to them, “So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.” In other words, Moses placed

the responsibility on the people of Israel to change their heart and inwardness so as not to be stubborn and rebellious against God. However, here in Deuteronomy 30:6, he is saying that God must produce the inner change in order that they obey Him in an appropriate manner. And this is exactly what God is going to do that will constitute a vital element of what it means for the entire group of Jews to be a “great nation.” The chosen remnant of them will all be people of changed heart by God and His Spirit living on the land of Israel. Plus, God will change the hearts of their descendants after the first generation so that they will continuously be the kind of people God wants them to be. And the result will be according to v. 6 that they “will love Yahweh [their] God with all [their] heart and with all [their] soul.” The word for “soul” is *nephesh*, which means existence. Thus, the Jews will love God with their whole existence, and God will make sure that they “live” on the land of Israel with great prosperity, health, and longevity. This has been His promise since Genesis 12:1-2.

In v. 7, Moses states that God will cause the curses of this covenant, which the Jews have already experienced themselves, to be placed on their enemies, i.e., any Gentile nation or people who hate them and persecute them. This will probably take place in the midst of God’s completing His promise to make the Jews a great nation, but it could just as easily occur during the time when they rule over the world with Jesus the Messiah after he returns. It seems reasonable to conclude that, if any people decide to oppose Jesus and the Jews during the millennial kingdom, God will subject them to the curses of the Mosaic Covenant.

Verses 8-10 go on to say that not only will the Jews “obey Yahweh...and observe all His commandments,” but also they will be a greatly prosperous nation, because He will “rejoice” over them as His obedient people as He had “rejoiced” over Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And this will be in the light of their fulfilling the condition which He has placed on them, “if you obey Yahweh your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to Yahweh your God with all your heart and soul” (v. 10). The Hebrew word for “if” in this verse could just as easily be translated “because.” I think this makes more sense in the context of v. 6 and the fact that God is going to circumcise the hearts of all Jews of the great nation on the land, and they will “obey” God and “observe” His commandments, because this is just what people of changed inwardness do. Therefore, Moses is saying that the nation of Israel during the millennial kingdom after Jesus’ return will live as authentic believers in God and Jesus *because* they will obey God appropriately *because* God has circumcised their hearts. And nothing and no one will stop them from doing so because God has made them His people and He has become their God.

In vs. 11-14, Moses makes the bold statement that God’s commandments are not impossible to keep. But he must be assuming that God changes people’s hearts so that they are inclined to want to obey them. In other words, if the Spirit of God does not circumcise a sinner’s heart, then by definition the person will be unwilling to believe God for any truth which He presents him and to obey His moral commandments appropriately. In this case, it will be impossible for the person to keep them with true faith and obedience. However, Moses is speaking in the context of God’s promise to Israel to make them a great nation, which includes His changing their hearts so that they will be willing to obey Him. Therefore, no Jew (or Gentile) can ever blame God for not making him willing internally to believe Him and obey Him. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out how to please God. The information is crystal clear, and everyone has the moral obligation to choose to submit himself to God and His spoken and written commandments in the Bible. In this sense, “the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it” (v. 14). God’s message and commandments are as close to these Israelites as they need them to be so that they may make the existential, human choice to subordinate themselves to them. And this is even while, from a theological standpoint and from His transcendent position as the author of this entire story, God must perform a miraculous, inward work in order for any sinner to become genuinely obedient.

The upshot of all this according to Moses in vs. 15-20 is that the Jews have a choice. They can either follow God’s instructions with authentic belief and live—both eventually as a great nation on the land of Canaan and in the realm of eternal life. Or they can reject them with unbelief and die—both by being expelled from the land and in eternity. In the first case, they will experience the

blessing of God “in the land where [their] are entering to possess it” (v. 16). In the second case, their hearts will turn away from God, and they will be drawn away to worship pagan idols, resulting in their living only for a while on the land they are crossing the Jordan River to possess. Thus, Moses in v. 19 can say, “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse.”

Moses ends this passage in the rest of v. 19 and in v. 20, “19 So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving Yahweh your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.” The challenge for Moses’ listeners is to make the right choice, the one that means long life and prosperity on the land of Canaan. This the same land that God swore to give to their forefathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and therefore by extrapolation to them. Therefore, Moses exhorts them to choose life through obedience for themselves and their descendants who come after them. The only problem is that the Bible reveals that they do not all make the right choice. Indeed, they will disobey God and approximately a thousand years later lose the land. Nevertheless, the Bible is also clear that far into the future, even future to us, God will fulfill His promise to Abraham and bring back a remnant who will truly believe and trust Him and become the great nation of Genesis 12:1-2.