

ISRAEL

THE APPLE OF GOD'S EYE

**FROM GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM TO
MODERN TIMES**

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I dedicate this book to my wife, Caty.
Thank you for your generous love, abiding faith, and unwavering belief in me.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

I opened the Bible to the book of Psalms and began to read. My eyes followed along the lines of the Holy Scriptures. In these unfamiliar verses, I began to see my own self. I wrestled inside, desperate for deliverance from a life of drugs and violence. I began to cry. Scenes from my life passed before my eyes. Pain, violence, injustice, lies and deception filled my past memories.

Suddenly, I felt someone standing near me - a presence full of love and warmth. God. He had waited for me all those years, and He had seen everything I had been through. As I began to understand this truth, it penetrated me to the core. For the first time, I was experiencing the love of my Heavenly Father.

A few hours later, still with tears in my eyes, I decided to share this experience with some friends. It sounded strange to them, but for me it was the most profound and indescribable experience that had ever happened in my life. God had been waiting for me to turn to Him all these years. He loved me. He was my Father!

Today I live in Haifa, a city located on Mount Carmel in northern Israel. Let me briefly tell you about the journey that led me to this encounter with God.

I was born into a secular family in the small, remote Jewish town of Birobidzhan in the former Soviet Union. When I was 18, my father suddenly passed away. This loss was profoundly painful. He was suddenly taken from me at a time when I needed a father the most. Soon afterwards, I started using hard drugs and my life became a living hell. The people closest to me, my mother and brother, saw no hope for me.

In my early life, I remember my father mentioning Israel from time to time. When the Soviet Union collapsed, I saw many Jews immigrating to Israel. Because my father was Jewish, according to Israel's Law of Return, I was allowed to become a citizen of the State of Israel. I thought that maybe I could get free from my lifestyle by simply changing my environment. So, in attempt to escape my addictions, I made aliyah (the term for Jewish immigration to the state of Israel) in 1998 at the age of 23.

When I arrived in Israel, I found myself in a new nation, with a culture and language that I was not familiar with. Unfortunately, my problems with drugs did not disappear. Instead, they intensified because of all of the stress. I got into a lot of trouble, committed crimes and ended up in prison. All along, I knew I wasn't born for this lifestyle. I knew there was a purpose for my life, but I couldn't find it on my own.

After prison, I met some people who spoke to me about Yeshua—the Messiah, the One who could give me a new beginning. I began to read the Bible and attend meetings with followers of Yeshua. And soon afterwards the God of the Bible revealed Himself to me personally. This encounter with God changed my life. I understood that Yeshua the Messiah died in order to give me a new life; a life where I am forgiven, a life where God would be my Father.

As a new believer in Yeshua, I began to study the Word of God. Soon afterwards, I realized that God foretold the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel through His prophets. God had promised to bring His people back to their land. Not only that, He promised to give them a new heart and a new spirit.

Now I understood that the personal encounter that I had with God was according to His word. He met me in the land of Israel and gave me a new heart, a new spirit and brought me into covenantal relationship with Him. As I studied the Word of God, I was amazed at how faithfully God always kept His promises. In particular, how God has been faithful to His covenant with Abraham, from the birth of Isaac to the rebirth of the State of Israel.

This book you hold in your hands is about God, and the nation of Israel - the apple of His eye. My prayer is that this book will add to your understanding of God's purposes for Israel and our world.

Chapter 1

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

He remembers His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham.

Psalm 105:8-9a

Chapter 1

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

The Bible tells us that the origin and beginning of the nation of Israel started with a man named Abram (who was later renamed by God, Abraham). God called Abram into His purposes and through him, created a nation for Himself. God's Covenant with Abraham is one of the foundational and central revelations in the Word of God. By calling Abraham to follow Him and later making a Covenant with him, God initiated His plan to restore all humanity back to Himself.

Every student of the Bible should study the significance of God's Covenant with Abraham. Understanding this Covenant and God's promises to Abraham enables better comprehension of the Old Testament, and provides greater insight into the New Testament.

THE CALL OF ABRAM

God first called Abram to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldeans¹, territory of present day Iraq. The Lord's word for Abram was to leave everything he knew, his country, his relatives and his father's house, and to follow Him into the land He would show him. Abram obeyed God's commands. In Geneses 12:1-4, we have God's first recorded words to Abram:

¹ Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."⁴ So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Genesis 12:1-4

God called Abram to leave everything, but He also gave Abram many promises:

1. ***I will make you a great nation*** - God promised to make a nation from Abram, with enough children and descendants to populate a nation.
2. ***I will bless you*** - The Lord promised to release His material and spiritual blessings into Abram's life.
3. ***I will make your name great*** - God would elevate Abram to a place of honor and glory.

¹Neh. 9:7; Acts 7:2

4. ***You shall be a blessing*** - Abram would not only be blessed by God, but he would also be a blessing to others. God would make Abram's life rich and powerful, and he would enrich the lives of others.
5. ***I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you*** - The blessing and cursing of men were dependent upon their behavior towards Abram. God would show favor to those who blessed Abram. However, He would curse those who cursed him.
6. ***In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*** - God promised to bless Abram even to the point that all families of the earth would be blessed through him.

Genesis 12:4 portrays Abram's obedience to God's command; he "*departed*" as the Lord had told him to.

VISION AND DIALOGUE

Genesis chapter 15 recounts two of Abram's encounters with God (15:1-6 and 7-21). The first took place at night (15:5) in the form of a vision (15:1) and refers to the promised seed. The second occurs at sundown (15:12), while Abram was in a deep sleep (15:12), and refers to the Promised Land.

God chooses to reveal Himself to Abram through a night vision. I believe this took place at night because later in verse 5, God brought Abram outside of his tent and asked him to look at the stars, which are only visible at night.

*¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."² But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but **one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.**"⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the **stars** if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "**So shall your descendants be.**"⁶ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

Genesis 15:1-6

God's word came to Abram in a vision, מַחֲזֵה ("*machazeh*" in Hebrew), from חָזַה ("chazah"), the verb 'to see.' God gave Abram the grace not only to hear His word, but also to see it. Later in the history of Israel, God will raise up prophets, people with ability to hear *and to see* what is on His heart. In Genesis 20:7, God calls Abram a prophet.

God revealed Himself as Abram's "shield" (defender) in a battle against a large army of kings just prior to this vision, where the Lord promises to be his future defender. Then He

promises to give Abram a great "reward" - descendants that will be as countless as the stars. Abram responded to this promise with faith. God's heart is touched and He now considers Abram a righteous man.

⁷ Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."⁸ And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

Genesis 15:7-8

Here, God reminds Abram that He brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give him the land of Canaan as his inheritance. Abram requests a sign to confirm that God will indeed fulfill the promise to him.

THE COVENANT

Genesis 15:9-21 speaks about "cutting" the Covenant where God binds Himself by promise to Abram by passing through slain animals as an act of confirmation.

In ancient times, a covenantal agreement between two people required them to fulfill the promises made between them. The Hebrew word for covenant is *berith* (ברית). Walking through the bodies of slain animals after a covenant agreement was reached was a common Old Testament custom. It solidified that the agreed terms of the covenant were binding and mandatory for both parties. If one party violated any term of the covenant, the other party would be freed from having to fulfill his end of the bargain. This type of covenant is known in Hebrew as the "*Brit beinHaBetarim*," the "covenant between the animal parts." In the book of Jeremiah we find another reference to this practice.

*¹⁸ And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, **when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it** — ¹⁹ the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf.*

Jeremiah 34:18-19

In the Genesis passage, God commands Abram to bring Him certain animals. Abram prepares the covenant by cutting them in half, and laying some of the animals opposite each other.

At the end of the day, Abram is still waiting on God. Eventually, a deep sleep falls upon Abram and the Lord tells him about the slavery and hardship of his future descendants (Israel) that will take place in Egypt. However, He promises that after four generations, they will come back to the Promised Land.

¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. ¹⁴ And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ **But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.**"

Genesis 15:12-16

God shows Abram that Israel will possess the Promised Land in the future, because at that present time the iniquity of the Amorites had not yet reached its fullness. The possession of the Promised Land by the Jews would *also* be God's judgment on the inhabitants of the Land of Canaan for their idolatry and sins.

Interestingly, Abram was not the one to pass through the animals. Abram slept, and God (represented by the smoking oven and the burning torch), passes through the animal parts by *Himself*.

¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there **appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.** ¹⁸ **On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—** ¹⁹ *the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites,* ²⁰ *the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,* ²¹ *the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.*"

Genesis 15:17-21

By walking through the animal parts by Himself, God makes an unconditional covenant. God binds Himself to give The Land to Abram's descendants. The fulfillment of the covenant does not depend on Abram's obedience! In addition, as the covenant was being made, the Lord reveals the geographical borders of the Promised Land for the first time.

THE NEW NAME

Twenty-four years after God calls Abram² and 13 years after Ishmael's birth,³ God reconfirms His covenant with Abram by repeating the promise of descendants and land. He also commands a sign: the circumcision of all males in his household. However, by this time, Sarai had probably lost hope of motherhood and Abram had probably accepted the idea that Ishmael was the promised son. God then appears, declares His name to Abram and changes both Abram's and Sarai's names. This story is recorded in Genesis 17.

²Gen. 12:7

³Gen. 16:16

The Lord chooses to reveal Himself as אֱלֹהִים (El Shaddai)⁴ to Abram. By using this distinctive name, He declares that only He has the power to fulfill His promises. God asks Abram to walk before Him (to serve Him) and to be blameless (fully committed).

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.² And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”³ Then Abram fell on his face...

Genesis 17:1-3a

After years of unfulfilled hope, Abram may have felt that God forgot His covenant with him. However, God reminds Abram that He has not forgotten it and promises to bless Abram if he will obey. Then, the Lord blesses Abram by promising to multiply his descendants "exceedingly," meaning even more than God had already promised. Abram falls on his face to express his humility. In Genesis 17:4-6, God gave Abram personal promises such as:

1. ***You shall be a father of many nations*** - Abram would become the father of many nations. Midianites and many other Arab nations through his son Ishmael, and the Jewish nation, Israel, through his son Isaac.
2. ***Your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations*** - God changed the name "Abram" (high or exalted father) to "Abraham" (father of a multitude).
3. ***I will make you exceedingly fruitful*** - Again, God promises many children to Abraham. In addition to the son he had with Sarai, (from whom sprung numerous offspring), he also had six sons with Keturah,⁵ who became the heads of large nations.
4. ***Kings shall come from you*** - God promised Abraham that his future descendants would be kings. Later on in history, the kings of Israel would track their lineage back to Abraham. King Saul, King David and the future King Messiah, would all be descendants of Abraham.

⁴*El Shaddai* - The All Sufficient God. *Shad* means "breast" in Hebrew (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Exod. 6:3; Num. 24:6; Ruth 1:20; Job (various references); Psa. 22:10; 68:15; 91:1; Ezek. 1:24; 10:5; 23:21 etc.). Occurs 48 times in the Tanakh. Most English translations render El Shaddai as "God Almighty," probably because the translators of the Septuagint (i.e., the Greek translation of the Old Testament) thought Shaddai came from a root verb (*shadad*) that means "to overpower" or "to destroy." The Latin Vulgate likewise translated Shaddai as "Omnipotens" (from which we get our English word omnipotent). God is so overpowering that He is considered "Almighty." (http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Names_of_G-d/El/el.html)

⁵Gen. 25:1-2

GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS

After He finished declaring His promises to Abraham, the Lord began to announce His promises concerning Abraham's descendants. Abraham's descendants would have a unique relationship with God. The Lord would have a covenantal relationship with them and it would remain forever.

⁷ And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. ⁸ Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Genesis 17:7-8

The Lord restates His promises to give Abraham and his descendants the Land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession.

CIRCUMCISION: A SIGN OF THE COVENANT

The Lord asks Abraham to confirm the covenant by commanding him to circumcise himself and every male in his house. This would be a sign of the covenantal relationship between God and His people. Through this act, Abraham binds himself to God in covenant relationship.

*⁹ And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹ and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and **it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.** ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. ¹³ He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."*

Genesis 17:9-14

Circumcision, the cutting away of the male foreskin, was common, but not a universal practice among ancient people groups.

“Circumcision was practiced widely in the ancient Near East as a rite of puberty, fertility or marriage. Although the Israelites were not only people to circumcise their sons, this sign was used to mark them as members of the covenantal community.”⁶

GOD RENAMES SARAI, AND PROMISES A SON

God tells Abraham he should no longer call his wife Sarai, but Sarah. This emphasizes that promises to bless her and to make her mother of his son and heir, even though it is past her time in life to do so (Sarah was 90 years old at this time). The promise of an heir is now narrowed to Abraham and Sarah.

*¹⁵ Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but **Sarah shall be her name.** ¹⁶ And I will bless her and also **give you a son by her**; then I will bless her, and she shall be **a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.**”*

Genesis 17:15-16

GOD CHOOSES ISAAC

In response to God’s promise, Abraham falls on his face and laughs. His laugh may have expressed his skepticism, but it could also have been a joyful reaction to God's promise. God is commanding Abraham to call the son Sarah would bear “Isaac,” laughter in Hebrew, with reference to Abraham's laughing.

*¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and **laughed** and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” ¹⁹ Then God said: “No, **Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac**; I will establish **My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.** ²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. ²¹ **But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.**” ²² Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.*

Genesis 17:17-22

God delivers a unique and powerful prophecy, which contains an answer to the wish of Abraham concerning Ishmael. Ishmael would become a great nation; he would have 12 sons

⁶The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament (IVP Bible Background Commentary) Inter Varsity Press, 2000. p. 49

that would be princes (the names of these twelve princes are found in Genesis 25:12-16). From Ishmael proceeded the various tribes of the Arabs. God promised to bless and multiply Ishmael and his posterity, but restates that He will establish His covenant with Isaac.

ABRAHAM OBEYS

When God finishes speaking, and leaves Abraham's presence, Abraham immediately fulfills the Lord's commandment. He circumcises himself that very day, along with all the male members of his house.

²³ So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁵ And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁶ That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; ²⁷ and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Genesis 17:23-27

SUMMARY

In Genesis 12:1-3, we see God's first recorded word to Abram. In these verses, God promises to make Abram a great nation, to bless him, and to make his name great. In Genesis 15, when God walks alone through the animal parts, He makes an unconditional covenant with Abraham, meaning that He alone was responsible for fulfilling these promises. The key elements of this covenant were God's promises of land, seed and blessings. In Genesis 17 God confirms the covenant again.

After the death of Abraham, God repeats and confirms his covenantal promises (a land, a people, and a blessing) to Abraham's son, Isaac, and grandson, Jacob. In His words to Abraham, God promises a multitude of descendants who would receive the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. God repeats the promise of numerous descendants who would later receive the land that was promised to Isaac and Jacob. God promises to bless the whole world through Abraham's seed. That seed becomes known as the nation of Israel.

The next Covenants, (God's covenant at Mount Sinai, God's covenant with David and the New Covenant) are the outcome of God's covenant with Abram. Each of them expands one major promise of God's Covenant with Abram: the Land, seed, and future blessings.