

7. God's Plan to Reach the World — Part 1

Previously...

Yahweh created the world for mankind to enjoy and also to thrive in. His purpose was to live with mankind and have a personal and loving relationship with every person. However, mankind repeatedly rejected their Creator-God and persistently rebelled against His good purposes for them. This is what we have seen so far:

The first couple rebelled

Adam and Eve were created innocent. They had the best chance of really thriving and remaining perfect forever. They had only one rule to obey: Do not eat the fruit. But they rebelled against Yahweh.



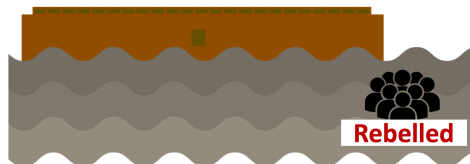
The first family rebelled

The first family was given the Divine Institution of family and told to live harmoniously. What happened instead was that Cain murdered his brother Abel.



The first generations rebelled

Instead of learning from Adam and Eve's mistake as well as Cain's, mankind continued to grow in evil until Yahweh brought judgment and wiped them from the face of the earth with the Global Flood.

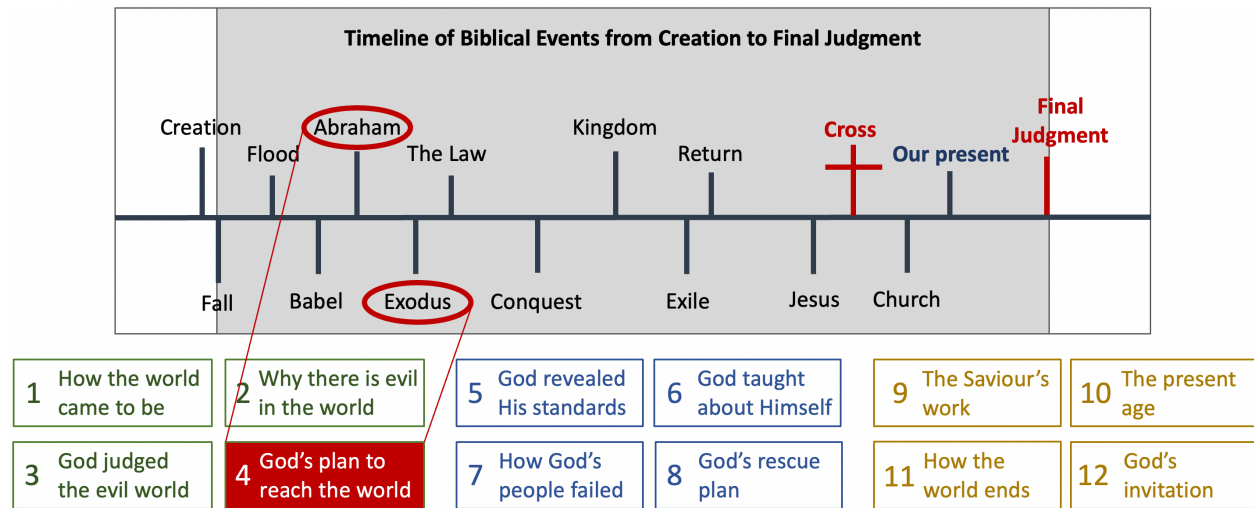


The people in the new world rebelled

God "re-started" humanity with righteous Noah and his family. All of them believed Him. Noah's descendants had the opportunity start afresh and choose to trust God in the new world they were living in. Unfortunately, there was still evil in their hearts. They chose to rebel against Yahweh instead. They made up their own truth and chose to live a life without God. So Yahweh disrupted their plans, scattered them and introduced many new languages and tribal diversity to slow down the spread of evil.



If mankind were to continue in their rebellion against Yahweh, all would face the second death. We will see in this lesson what God did next.



Who will share information about Yahweh

Right after Adam and Eve rebelled against Yahweh, He had promised that He would send a Saviour, the offspring of the woman, who would destroy sin and evil permanently and rescue mankind from their sin problem. However, for God to save mankind from eternal death:

- He would need to keep an accurate record of His history and His message to the world about how to be saved.
- He would need to make it available so that people could learn about it and decide if they would trust Him and accept His solution to the sin problem.

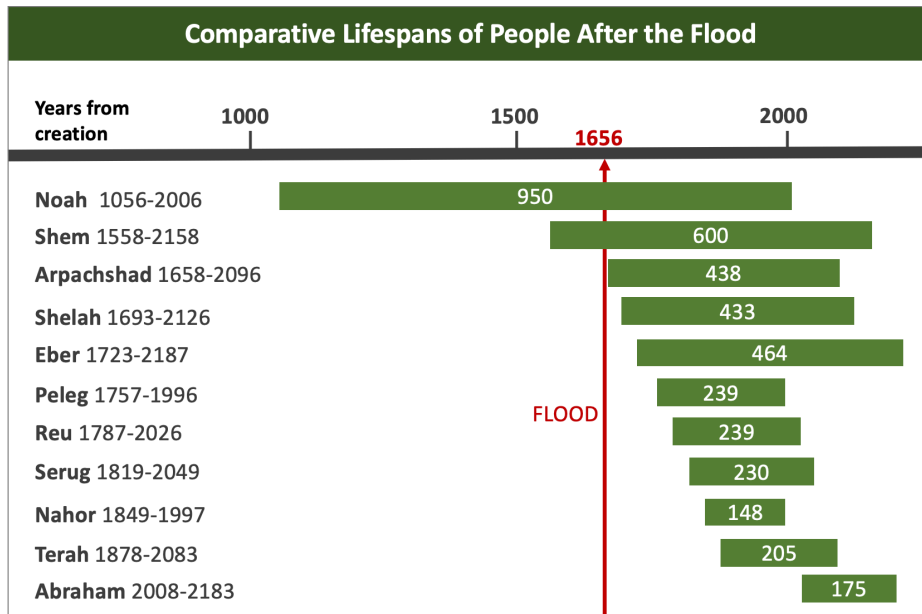
However, the people in the new world after the Flood could not be relied on to preserve Yahweh's history and truth and share it with all mankind. This was because they themselves had already rejected Him.



So, in order to save mankind, Yahweh intervened by calling a man named Abram (later called Abraham).

YAHWEH'S PLAN WITH ABRAHAM

Abraham was a descendant of Noah, ten generations down. He lived around 2000 BC.



Abraham lived in a place called Ur. It was located near Babel, the place where the rebellious people tried to build their tower. People from that whole area were known as Chaldeans. This is what happened when Yahweh approached Abraham.



Genesis 12:1–4a

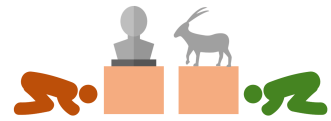
¹ The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you.” ² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” ⁴ So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him.

Let’s take a closer look at what exactly God said to Abraham.

1. Leave your country

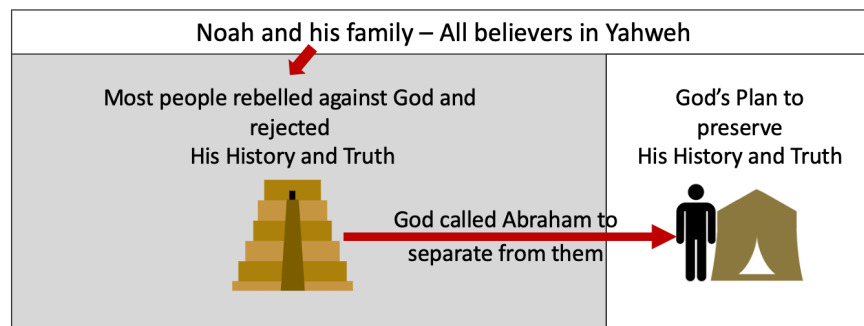
First, Yahweh told Abraham to leave his own country and move away (see verse 1). Why did He do that? It was because He wanted Abraham to separate himself from the beliefs and lifestyles of the society that he was living in.

Ur, where Abraham lived, was filled with people who worshipped many different idols and gods. Idols are images made from materials like stone, wood, gold or silver. People would design them and then handcraft them. They came up with the idea that these idol-gods each had power over a certain aspect of the world like the sun, rivers, or a particular area of land. As a society, they would then worship these idol-gods in order to please them and thereby receive society-wide benefits such as good weather, good harvests and more.



While he lived among them, Abraham would be expected to serve and worship these man-made gods. If he did, he would be no different from all the people of the world who had already rejected Yahweh, the Creator-God of all. He would be of no use to God in recording His history and truth and sharing it with the rest of the world.

So when Yahweh approached Abraham and asked him to leave his country, God was not asking him to shun others or isolate himself from everyone else. Rather, God was asking him to leave behind wrong thinking and wrong worship. God was giving Abraham the opportunity to learn about Him personally and to preserve an accurate record of Yahweh’s history and truth. This record would then be offered to all people of future generations. God did not want His message mixed up or confused with the man-made beliefs of Abraham’s society.



2. Abraham decided to trust Yahweh

Even though God had not yet told Abraham where to go, Abraham made the decision to trust Him. Abraham listened to Yahweh and together with his entire household, left Ur (see verse 4). Abraham's nephew, Lot, also decided to trust Yahweh and so he followed his uncle.

3. Yahweh's promises to Abraham

Interestingly, when God approached Abraham and asked him to leave Ur, He also made him some very remarkable promises. Let's take a closer look at the verses again.

Genesis 12:1–3

¹ The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you." ² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

God was telling Abraham that:

- He would give him **LAND**.
- He would make him into a great nation, meaning that he would have many **DESCENDANTS**.
- But most remarkably, He would make Abraham famous and Abraham would be a **BLESSING to the entire world!**



Yahweh did not explain more at this point, but later, at another place and time, God spoke about these promises again.

And in fact, Yahweh made an official contract with Abraham regarding these promises.

Yahweh's contract with Abraham: the Abrahamic Covenant

We will first read the account of this event in the Bible.



Let's turn to our Bibles and read Genesis 15:1–21.

(The leader reads aloud. For reference, the verses are also here.)

Genesis 15:1–21

¹ Some time later, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."

² But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. ³ You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir."

⁴ Then the LORD said to him, “No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir.” ⁵ Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, “Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!”

⁶ And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

⁷ Then the LORD told him, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.”

⁸ But Abram replied, “O Sovereign LORD, how can I be sure that I will actually possess it?”

⁹ The LORD told him, “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ So Abram presented all these to him and killed them. Then he cut each animal down the middle and laid the halves side by side; he did not, however, cut the birds in half. ¹¹ Some vultures swooped down to eat the carcasses, but Abram chased them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a terrifying darkness came down over him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, “You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. ¹⁵ (As for you, you will die in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.) ¹⁶ After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction.”

¹⁷ After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses. ¹⁸ So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River— ¹⁹ the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

This event happened some years after God initially approached Abraham. Abraham had already left Ur as God had told him to, but he and his wife remained childless.






Abraham must have been wondering about the earlier promises God had made to him and what had become of them.

We see that God had not forgotten His promises. In fact, to make sure that Abraham knew how serious He was about keeping His promises, God made a legal contract or a covenant with him. And God included a very solemn ceremony to ensure Abraham knew how serious He was.



This is the second contract that we see Yahweh make in the Bible. The first contract God made was the New World Contract where He promised never to send another Global Flood.

Here is a summary of the details of this contract God made with Abraham.

 Abrahamic Covenant	
 Parties	God, Abraham and descendants
 Promises	Land, descendants, worldwide blessing
 Signatories	God alone (by passing between the animal halves)
 Type	Unconditional

Now let's look at each part of this contract.



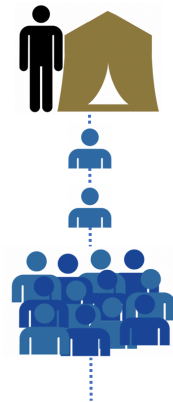
The parties to the Abrahamic Contract

In the passage we just read, God talked about His promises in relation to Abraham and his descendants. This contract was for no one else. These parties were also confirmed at a later time when God said this to Abraham.

Genesis 17:7

“I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

God specifically identified the parties of the contract. He also promised that the covenant would be everlasting, meaning it would go on forever. This contract is therefore still valid today and has not expired.



Promises or the legal terms of the Abrahamic Contract

God had earlier promised Abraham (i) land, (ii) descendants, and that (iii) his family would be a worldwide blessing. Later on, God gave more details.



i. Land

God promised Abraham that his descendants would have eternal possession of actual, physical land in the Middle East. The boundary of this land starts from near Egypt and goes northwards up to at least Syria.

Genesis 15:18–21

¹⁸ So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River—
¹⁹ the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”



Moreover, God said that Abraham's descendants would own this land forever.

Genesis 13:14–15

¹⁴ After Lot had gone, the LORD said to Abram, “Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. ¹⁵ I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession.”

However, God also told Abraham something that would happen in his future. He said that Abraham's descendants would be slaves for 400 years in another land. But God would bring them back into the land He had given them (which is often called the “Promised Land”).

When Yahweh told these things to Abraham, He also mentioned that the sins of the people group known as the Amorites had not yet reached such a terrible state that God had to take action against them.

This implied that there would come a time when the Amorites' sins would be so great that God would respond by judging them with punishment. Let's see that passage once again.

Genesis 15:13–14, 16

¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, “You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. ¹⁶ After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction.”

We will see what God meant regarding the Amorites and the Promised Land in a later lesson.



ii. Descendants

When God first approached Abraham, this is what He said regarding descendants.

Genesis 12:2

I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.

Now, in the contract, God also promised Abraham that his descendants would come from a son of his own. And from this son would come so many descendants that they could not be counted.

Genesis 15:4–5

⁴ Then the LORD said to him, “No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir.” ⁵ Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, “Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!”

Yahweh was essentially promising that Abraham’s descendants would survive. As a people group, they would never be wiped out. Instead, they would be a great and famous nation.



iii. Worldwide Blessing

The third promise that Yahweh made to Abraham was that he and his descendants would be a blessing to the whole world.

Genesis 12:3b

All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

The reason why God approached Abraham to begin with was because He was going to involve him in His plan to save mankind from eternal death. Here are the details.

a. Abraham’s family would preserve God’s history and truth for the world

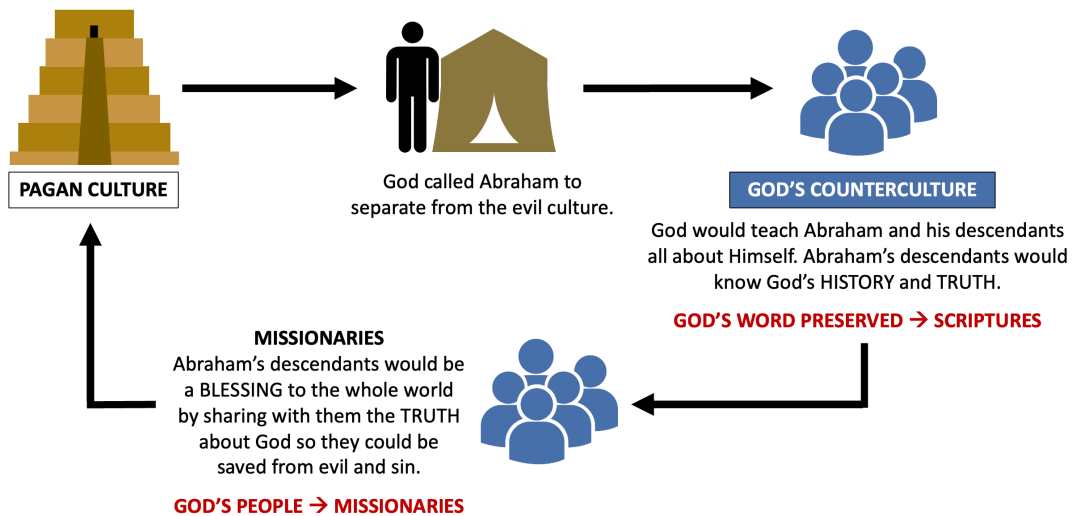
God chose Abraham and his descendants to ensure His Word and His truth would be kept pure, accurate and available to all generations all over the world. This was how mankind would come to know Him and have an opportunity to be saved.

Specifically, God planned to **separate** Abraham and his descendants from the idol-worshipping culture of their day.

Through them, He would build a **counterculture**. This means that they would live as Yahweh’s people by obeying Him. They would live the way in which God had designed mankind to live. In this way, they would be a model society. Abraham’s descendants would be so different from the rest of mankind in the way that they had chosen to live that the peoples of the world would ask Abraham’s family which God they worshipped. In this way, God would use Abraham’s family to draw the world to Him.

And importantly, God would use Abraham's family to **preserve His Word** in the form of **written Scriptures**.

Abraham's descendants would then take God's message to the whole world. They would **tell people** about Yahweh using His Scriptures.



The Bible calls Abraham a Hebrew. His descendants are known as the Hebrews. (Later on, we will see that they also become known as the nation of Israel and are also called Israelites or the Jews). They are the ones God chose to record and preserve His revelation.

Romans 3:2b

First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.

Yahweh also made it clear that the nation of Israel would be responsible for being His witnesses or missionaries, meaning that they had the job to tell the world about Him and His truth. God told the prophet Isaiah to record this plan.

Isaiah 43:10–12

¹⁰ “But you are my witnesses, O Israel!” says the LORD.

“You are my servant.

You have been chosen to know me, believe in me,
and understand that I alone am God.

There is no other God—

there never has been, and there never will be.

¹¹ I, yes I, am the LORD,
and there is no other Savior.

¹² First I predicted your rescue,
then I saved you and proclaimed it to the world.

No foreign god has ever done this.

You are witnesses that I am the only God,”
says the LORD.

In verse 12, God says that He predicted that He would rescue Israel. This referred to what God told Abraham in Genesis 15:14, that Abraham's family would be slaves to another people group. But later on, we will indeed see how God fulfilled His promise to rescue them after 400 years.

So the first way that God planned for Abraham and his family to be a worldwide blessing was for them to record His Word and share it with the world.

But there was another reason why Abraham's family would be a blessing to the world.

b. The Saviour that God promised to send would be Abraham's descendant.

Recall that Adam and Eve had rebelled against God, and so they and all their descendants, meaning all of mankind would suffer the consequence of eternal death.

However, God immediately told them that He would send a Saviour, the offspring of the woman, to crush Satan and his offspring, meaning, all who follow Satan's evil ways.

Genesis 3:15

And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel."



It appears that Abraham understood and believed this promise about the offspring of the woman. Now when God promised Abraham descendants and said he would be a worldwide blessing, God was also intending for this particular offspring of the woman to come from Abraham's family line. This means the Saviour would be Abraham's descendant.

This next verse is what this Saviour Himself said much later on in history when He was speaking to a Samaritan woman, a Gentile.

John 4:22

You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews.

(Note: Jews are descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob while Gentiles refer to all people who are not from Jacob's family. The Samaritans were not true Jews but a mixed people group.)

The Saviour Himself was referring to God's plan for rescuing the world: God's chosen Saviour would be a Jew. This Jewish Saviour would do something that would give mankind the opportunity to be saved from eternal death.

This is the second reason why Abraham's family would be a blessing to the world: the promised Saviour would come from his family line.

God's purpose in choosing Abraham was not because He did not care for the rest of the world. But because the world was rejecting Him, God decided to work with Abraham and his family, and through them, bless and save the whole world.



The Saviour



The signing of the Abrahamic Contract

Contracts or covenants are signed by the parties responsible for carrying out the agreement. In the Bible, there are two kinds of covenants.

- A **conditional or bilateral (two-way) covenant** is an agreement that two parties agree to and where both have responsibilities or obligations to fulfil.
- An **unconditional or unilateral (one-way) covenant** is an agreement between two parties but only one party has responsibilities to fulfil. The other party doesn't need to do anything.



For example, the New World Covenant was an unconditional covenant. **God alone was responsible** for the promise of not flooding the earth again. So God alone signed the covenant with the rainbow. Noah did not sign it. There was nothing Noah could do to fulfil the promise of not flooding the earth. It would be God's work, not man's.

The Abrahamic Covenant was also an unconditional covenant. **God alone was responsible** for fulfilling the promises He made to Abraham of (i) land, (ii) descendants and (iii) a worldwide blessing. The ceremony for this covenant showed that God alone signed it.

When Abraham asked Yahweh how he could be sure that Yahweh would keep His promises, Yahweh went ahead to sign the contract alone. Let's see again what happened.

Genesis 15:8–10, 12, 17–18a

⁸ But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I be sure that I will actually possess it?"

⁹ The LORD told him, "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ So Abram presented all these to him and killed them. Then he cut each animal down the middle and laid the halves side by side; he did not, however, cut the birds in half.



¹² As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a terrifying darkness came down over him.

¹⁷ After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses. ¹⁸ So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day...

In this “signing” ceremony, God Himself, represented by the smoking firepot and flaming torch, passed between the halves of the animals that Abraham had slaughtered.



Why so gruesome? What is the meaning of this?

In Bible times, passing between halves of cut animals was a way of signing very serious contracts. The one walking between the slaughtered animals was in effect saying, “May a curse fall on me if I break the contract.” In other words, this was how the signing parties acknowledged that whoever violated the agreement might well be cut in half.

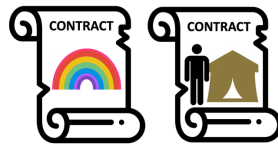
So Yahweh, in signing this covenant alone, was saying that He was totally responsible for fulfilling the promises in the covenant. **He Himself would be cursed and damned, or “cut in half”, if what He promised to Abraham did not happen.**

Abraham did not sign the covenant. He could not. God put him into a deep sleep because God was declaring that Abraham could do nothing to accomplish the promises made in the contract. God Himself would do everything.

In his vision, Abraham saw Yahweh alone signing the contract. The message was clear: Yahweh was doing it all. It would be entirely God's work, not man's.

Why would Yahweh, the Creator-God of the universe, come up with contracts for monitoring His behaviour and measuring whether He has kept His obligations? Why would He curse Himself if He failed to keep His promises? This doesn't sound like a good arrangement for God.

Yahweh has done this because He wants mankind to know who He is and what He is like. He is a promise-maker and promise-keeper who **intends to fulfil His contracts fully**. He wants mankind to see that **He can be trusted to keep all the promises He makes**.



Does Yahweh keep His promises?
If so, He can be trusted.

4. Abraham believed God's promises even before God made the covenant with him

Earlier on, we saw that when Yahweh approached Noah and told him that He would be sending a Global Flood, Noah believed God. He started building the ark according to the plans God had given him. Because of Noah's and his family's faith in Yahweh, his entire household were all saved from the devastating global judgment that Yahweh sent on the world.

Now, we see that Abraham also made the personal decision to trust Yahweh. This is what the Bible records.

Genesis 15:6

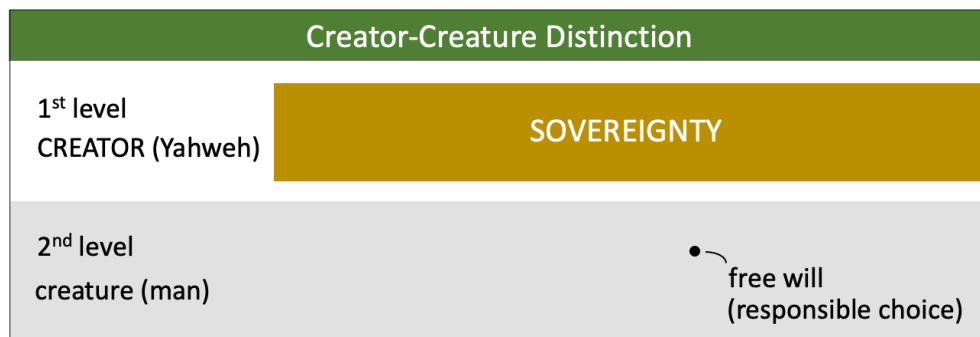
And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Abraham believed the information he had about Yahweh, that He was the true Creator-God and He had promised that the offspring of the woman would solve mankind's sin problem.

Genesis 15:6 records something interesting. It says that when Abraham believed Yahweh, Yahweh **counted him as righteous because of his faith**.

When Yahweh approached Abraham, he could decide for himself what he would do. Yahweh did not force Abraham to do anything he didn't want to. But Abraham decided to trust God's promises to him and obey His instructions.

What the Bible shows is that while God is sovereign and in control of everything, He can exercise control without overriding man's personal responsibility in making decisions. This is because God is absolutely and totally on a different level of being than mankind.



The Bible says that ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve, all people have been born outside the garden of Eden, separated from God. We saw how evil and wicked most of Adam and Eve's descendants were. And even after God gave mankind a chance to "restart", we saw how evil and wicked most of Noah's descendants were.

Yet here, the Bible says that God counted Abraham as righteous.

What does this mean? What are the consequences of this? We will learn more about this in a later lesson.

What happened next?

We will see what happened after Yahweh approached Abraham and Abraham believed Him and responded. We will see that God started working to make sure that He would be able to keep His promises to Abraham.



Bible reading for review
Genesis 12:1–9, 15:1–21