A CONCISE BIBLE SURVEY
TRACING THE PROMISES OF GOD

CHRISTOPHER CONE
A Concise Bible Survey: Tracing the Promises of God

Electronic edition

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Studying the Bible is like studying the forest and the trees. Exegesis examines the detail of every leaf.

Systematic theology categorizes every kind of tree.

Synthetic survey takes a bird’s eye view of the whole forest. Without that broad perspective, we don’t know where the leaves fit, and we can’t begin to fathom how many different kinds of trees there really are.

Can you see the forest from the trees?

Enjoy the forest...
Affectionately dedicated to

My cherished Cathy – Thank you for who you are to me, and for making this possible. Your love for the Lord brings me joy. Many have done nobly, but you excel them all.
I love you.
and

My adored Christiana & Cara Grace– I pray that this will help you both as you seek His face. I hope that it adds to your joy in studying His Word, and that through it, in some small way, I may pass along to you an example of His love, as my blessed parents have tirelessly done for me. I love you.

With special thanks to

Ralph, Lucy and KC Cone,

When I glance at the pages of Scripture, I am reminded of your gift to me. You taught me to love the Lord and to cherish His word. There is no greater gift that parents and a brother could have given. My heart has been shaped by your examples and by your love. I only pray that I could be such a blessed influence to others. I owe you a debt of love.
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Introduction

The Bible is an amazing book. It has been circulated more, read more, and discussed more than any other book in all of history. But it is more than just a book. It is more than just a compilation of stories and narratives and morals and poems. God's word is an orderly communication of Himself, and to specific ends. God seeks to be known. After all, John 17:3 tells us that the true meaning of life – even the very definition of life – is to know God. The Bible, therefore, is God's revelation of Himself to mankind, in order that His character may be clearly demonstrated, seen, and to whatever degree He desires, understood.

We are told that all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). Consequently the value of examining the words of Scripture is great, for they are His words – His own accounting of Himself and His plan. His creative work is evident to all, and much of His character and person can be seen in creation itself. As the Psalmist says, “the heavens are telling of the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). But yet, He has graciously given us so much more than even the artful creation before us. He has graced us with the His word of truth, that which is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. For how shall we come to Him if we are not told of Him, and who shall tell us of Him if He does not tell us Himself? But He does tell us. And just as in creation we see patterns and organization, we see the same themes of sovereignty, holiness, and grandeur running throughout the Bible.

Connecting these themes is an important thread running through the entire Scriptures. That thread is a key to understanding Scripture as one clear and cohesive message. It guides us from the opening words of Genesis to the closing Amen of Revelation, and ties them together so beautifully that it is evident that only God could be the author of such an incredibly divine symphony of life.

God’s promises and the fulfillment of those promises provide the basic structure and outline of God’s communication with man in the Bible. Not only does a Bible survey based on the promises of God give us an outline of Scripture, but it also provides an outline
of world history itself - including past, present, and future. Through understanding the promises of God, we get a glimpse of the glory of the covenant-keeping God.

*Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

*John 20:30-31*

Meaning of *Bible*: From the Greek singular noun *biblos*, referred to the 11th century use in Egypt of the outer surface of a papyrus reed for writing. Christians later used the plural *biblia* to describe their writings as early as 100AD. This term was transliterated into Old French, and later, modern English.
The books of the Hebrew Bible can be categorized into four different categories: Chronological, Complementary, Wisdom, and Prophetic.

**CHRONOLOGICAL BOOKS** - There are eleven such books, forming the backbone of the Hebrew Bible, covering 3600 years in chronological order. One leads into the next, and read one after the other, they cover the entire chronology of the Hebrew Bible.

**Genesis** – (4004-1900) – creation, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

**Exodus** – (1525-1440) – the conclusion of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt, the Exodus, and the Mosaic Covenant.

**Numbers** – (1440-1400) – Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness, the two numberings, one before the wandering, one after.

**Joshua** – (1400-1370) – Israel’s swift, yet incomplete conquest of Canaan.

**Judges** – (1370-1050) – covers the years that judges ruled Israel.

**1 Samuel** – (1100-1011) – the call of Samuel, the reign of Saul, and the early life of David.

**2 Samuel** – (1011-971) – the reign of David as king over Israel.

**1 and 2 Kings** – (971-586) – Solomon’s kingdom, the divided kingdom, and the beginning of the exile.

**Ezra** – (538-450) – the spiritual restoration of Israel from the exile.

**Nehemiah** – (445-433) – the political restoration of Israel from the exile, and chronologically ends the Old Testament.
COMPLEMENTARY BOOKS – They contain historical accounts, and cover time periods contemporary to the Chronological Books. The events of Job occur during the time of Genesis.

Leviticus is contemporary to Exodus.

Deuteronomy records the second giving of the Law occurring chronologically in the book of Numbers.

Ruth lived during the times of the judges.

1 Chronicles covers the events of 2 Samuel from a priestly perspective.

2 Chronicles deals with the events of 1 and 2 Kings from a priestly perspective.

The events of Esther took place after the exile.

WISDOM BOOKS – These books were written or compiled primarily during the Monarchy and Divided Kingdom.

Psalms – written primarily by David, some by Asaph, Moses, Solomon, and others.

Proverbs – wisdom verses primarily from the pen of Solomon.

Ecclesiastes – an examination by Solomon of the meaning of life.

Song of Solomon – a portrait of marital love, also by Solomon.

PROPHETIC BOOKS – five groups of prophetic books written during the Monarchy, Divided Kingdom, and Exile:

A. Prophets to the Nations

   Obadiah (840) – message of judgment to Edom.

   Jonah (780) – a call for repentance to Ninevah.

   Nahum (650-612) – oracle of judgment against Ninevah.

B. Prophets to the Northern Kingdom of Israel

   Amos (755) – judgment, a call to repentance, and promise of future restoration.

   Hosea (750) – a vivid portrait of God’s love toward Israel, despite her unfaithfulness.
C. Prophets to the Southern Kingdom of Judah

**Joel** (835) – judgment, deliverance, the Day of the Lord, and future blessing.

**Micah** (725) – judgment on the North and South, rebuke of the leaders, and future hope.

**Isaiah** (740-680) – the rejection and restoration of Israel by God, and the coming of Messiah.

**Zephaniah** (625) – the Day of the Lord: a day of wrath, and a day of restoration.

**Habakkuk** (609) – questions of God’s sovereignty in dealing with Israel.

**Jeremiah** (627-586) – final pronouncements of judgment, promises of future blessing.

D. Prophets during the Exile

**Lamentations** (586) – Jeremiah’s mourning over the fall of Jerusalem.

**Ezekiel** (593-570) – the sovereignty of God, judgment on Israel, and the future hope of the Kingdom.

**Daniel** (536) – God’s deliverance of His people, and the timelines.

E. Prophets during the Restoration

**Haggai** (520) – encouragement to complete the temple.

**Zechariah** (520-518) – visions, messages, and burdens of hope and redemption for Israel.

**Malachi** (450-400) – rebuke of priests, and promise of the forerunner.
# The Hebrew Bible*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Books</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. The Torah (Law):</strong></td>
<td>Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **2. The Nevi‘im (Prophets):** | A. The Former: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings  
B. The Latter: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) |
| **3. The Ketuvim (Writings):** | A. Psalms, Proverbs, Job  
B. Megillot (Scrolls): Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther  
C. Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles |

*Collectively referred to as the TaNaK, an acronym of the three sections.
The Chronology Of the Hebrew Bible
Promises Made
Conscience and Theocracy

4004-1370 BC
Chronological Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genesis</th>
<th>Exodus</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Joshua</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4004-1900 BC</td>
<td>1525-1440 BC</td>
<td>1440-1400 BC</td>
<td>1400-1370 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complementary Books

| Job | Leviticus | Deuteronomy |

Key Promises
The First Promise: The Need For Redemption Gen. 2:15-17
The Noahic Covenant Gen. 8:21-9:17 (6:5-8)
The Abrahamic Covenant Gen. 12:1-3, 15:3-21 (45:5)
The Egyptian Exile and Exodus Gen. 15:13-14 (45:5); Ex. 6:2-8; 12:12-13,40
The Land Covenant Gen. 15:18-21; Deut 30, Josh 24
Regarding Ishmael Gen. 16:10-14, 21:9-21 (17:17-21)
Regarding Isaac Gen. 17:17-21
Regarding Jacob and Esau -----------------------------Gen. 25:22-23  
To Jacob------------------------------------------------Gen. 28:10-17 (49:10)  
Regarding Judah: Tribe of Royalty ---------------------Gen. 49:10  
The Mosaic Covenant -----------------------------------Ex 20-24  
The Wilderness Exile -----------------------------------Num. 14:28-35  
The Exile From The Promised Land----------------------Lev. 25:1-4; 26:1-46;  
Deut. 28-30 (9:4,6) (15:4-5,11)  
Failed Conquest ---------------------------------------Josh. 23:11-13
Key Promises

The First Promise: The Need for Redemption ----------Gen. 2:15-17
The Redemptive Promise: A Suffering Messiah ----------Gen. 3:15
The Noahic Covenant --------------------------------Gen. 8:21-9:17
The Abrahamic Covenant -------------------------Gen. 12:1-3; 15:3-21
The Egyptian Exile and Exodus -----------------Gen. 15:13-14
The Land Covenant -------------------------------Gen. 15:18-21
Regarding Ishmael -------------------------------Gen. 16:10-14; 21:9-21
Regarding Isaac ----------------------------------Gen. 17:17-21
Regarding Jacob and Esau ------------------------Gen. 25:22-23
To Jacob -----------------------------------------Gen. 28:10-17
Regarding Judah: Tribe of Royalty---------------Gen. 49:10
Title

The Hebrew title of the book is *bereshith* (the first word in the Hebrew text), meaning *in the beginning*. *Genesis* is from the Latin translation of this word and is also related to the Greek root *genos*, referring to lineage and beginnings.

Authorship

Moses’ authorship of the Torah (or Pentateuch - the first five books of the Bible) is affirmed throughout Scripture. The Biblical interpreter using the literal grammatical-historical interpretive method will conclude that Moses was indeed the author.

There are numerous claims within the Torah of Mosaic authorship as well as other Hebrew Bible books containing statements to the same effect. Further, Christ Himself identified Moses as the writer of the first five books on more than 15 recorded occasions. Most significantly in Luke 24:44 He refers to the entire Hebrew Bible, divided as the Jews of that day recognized into three categories: “the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms.”

Only in recent years has Mosaic authorship of these books been challenged and most notably so by Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). Wellhausen argued for the Documentary Theory, also known as the JEDP theory – a theory that suggested several men as being responsible for the authorship of the Torah:

“J” is for “Jahwist,” as this supposed author seemed to prefer to use the name Jehovah (in Hebrew, *Yahweh*) for God. This author wrote in approximately 850 BC.

“E” is for “Elohist,” as this author penned the Hebrew word *Elohim* when referring to God. He wrote around 750 BC.

“D” is for “Deuteronomist,” the unnamed redactor of 650 BC who edited and combined documents “J” and “E,” arriving at the deuteronomistic account.

“P” is for the “Priestly” author, primarily of Leviticus, but of other priestly and institutional sections as well.
This form of criticism assumes that because there are variances in the writing ‘style’ and because there is found within these books a very broad range of subjects, time, and information covered, that it could not possibly be the work of just one author, and the theory dismisses completely the idea of God’s inspiring and revealing work.

While Wellhausen was not the primary originator of this theory, he seemed to be it’s loudest defender. And the issue at stake is not simply the question of who wrote these books. The process by which Wellhausen and others arrive at their conclusions is a dangerous one, as Gleason Archer points out:

The Documentary Theory has been characterized by a subtle species of circular reasoning; it tends to posit its conclusion (the Bible is no supernatural revelation) as its underlying premise (there can be no such thing as supernatural revelation)...Unfortunately...it rendered impossible any fair consideration of the evidences presented by the Scripture of supernatural revelation. Furthermore, it made it absolutely obligatory to find rationalistic, humanistic explanations of every miraculous or God-manifesting feature or episode in the text of Scripture.4

It is imperative for the Bible student to recognize the conflict between Biblical claims and the claims of liberal criticism. They are mutually exclusive. As a result, we must make a choice to either acknowledge God’s sovereign and supernatural work in revealing Himself or to thoroughly discount it.

But again, despite any lack of clarity in the arguments or intentions of the critics of Mosaic authorship, the Bible stands clear in its testimony that Moses was the mouthpiece chosen by God to pen the Torah.
Structure

In addition to the topical divisions of Genesis (as shown in the outline chart) the book is also divided into twelve sections, each one (except for the first) beginning with the Hebrew word *toledoth* (*the generations of*). The *toledoth* divisions are as follows:

1. Creation 1:1 - 2:3 (no *toledoth* introduction)
2. The account of the heavens and the earth 2:4 - 4:26
3. The book of the genealogy of Adam 5:1 - 6:8
4. The genealogy of Noah 6:9 - 9:29
5. The genealogy of the sons of Noah 10:1 - 11:9
6. The genealogy of Shem 11:10-26
7. The genealogy of Terah (Abraham) 11:27 - 25:11
8. The genealogy of Ishmael 25:12-18
10. The genealogy of Esau 36:1-8
11. The genealogy of the sons of Esau 36:9-43
12. The genealogy of Jacob 37:1 - 50:26

Genesis 1 -11

God Relates to Man in General

The first eleven chapters of Genesis give us the account of God’s dealings with mankind in general. Throughout these first chapters, we see God beginning to hone in on specific people through whom He will work His master plan. Genesis 1-2 records the account of creation, and chapter two is highlighted by God’s first promise to man:

> And the Lord God commanded the man saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die’ (2:16-17).
At this early stage in history Adam and Eve had life—they knew God intimately and had a beautiful fellowship with Him. That fellowship was to be maintained and protected simply by obeying one imperative.

Genesis 3 gives us the account of Adam and Eve’s failure to keep this command. The consequence was death—in immediate spiritual death, and eventual physical death. God had kept His first promise. Mankind was immediately separated from fellowship with God—further demonstrated by God when He banished the first couple from the Garden of Eden. The fellowship was irrevocably destroyed, and man had no ability to correct it. But even in the tragedy of God’s pronounced judgment, He made another promise:

And I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel (3:15).

As God pronounced judgment on the serpent (Satan, see Rev. 12:9; 20:2), He declared that the seed of woman would execute this very judgment. Note that seed here is singular—it references a specific descendant. It later becomes evident that this promise would provide the means to restore the fellowship between God and His created beings. With each promise made in Scripture, God’s plan becomes clearer. In the beginning, the promises seem vague and somewhat mysterious, but as Scripture progresses we find the promises explicitly specific.

Genesis 4 records the tragic murder of Abel by his brother Cain, and again—even as God is judging the wickedness of Cain He makes another promise of deliverance, this one specifically for Cain (4:15). Genesis 5 gives us the record of the descendants of Adam through Noah—the next man to whom God would make a promise. Genesis 6 begins with God’s lament over what mankind had become:
Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (6:5).

The evil on earth had become so great that God would no longer tolerate it. He could perhaps have blotted out mankind entirely and started over – but remember, He had made a promise of deliverance (3:15) that He must keep. God keeps His promises, so God chose a man through whom the thread would continue. That man was Noah.

God’s promises do not fail. Even though God would judge mankind by flood, He kept His promise. Genesis 7-8 records the events of the flood and how God remembered the righteousness of Noah, and how He used Noah to save a remnant of the human race, in order to keep His promise. In Genesis 8 God makes another promise, this one to Noah. The Noahic Covenant is comprised of two parts:

First is the element of the promise that God made to Himself:

And the Lord said to Himself, ‘I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done; while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease’ (8:21b-22).

At this point we now know that God will spare human life and the continuous cycle of life until He has accomplished His purpose – which includes keeping His promises.

Second is the covenant God makes with Noah:

‘...And I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth’ (9:11).
God then refers to this covenant as an “everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” Once again, God makes Himself accountable to creation by giving His word that He will not destroy the earth by flood ever again. Just ponder the grace of God: He has all the intrinsic power as the Creator and the Almighty, yet He limits (by the promises in His word) what He can and will do. This is a theme evident throughout the Bible: God willingly limits Himself. By His declaration that He will do one thing, He eliminates the possibility that He will do the opposite. And so it is that the Almighty God reaches down to us.

It should also be noted, if only in passing at this point, that the Noahic Covenant also includes some other significant points, including permission to eat meat (9:3-4), and a mandate for capital punishment as the consequence for murder (9:6).

Genesis 10 continues on to trace the progeny of Noah. He had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood (10:32).

Mankind grew numerous and mighty in unity. Genesis 11 records man’s continued defiance of God:

And they said, ‘Come let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth’ (11:4).

This was a direct violation of God’s command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (1:28; 9:1), and it resulted in God taking unique action once again to further His plan. Genesis 11 records the events at the Tower of Babel, where God confused man’s languages and destroyed their unity, forcing them to scatter and once again submit to the will of the Almighty God.
The chapter closes with the genealogy of Shem, differing from the genealogy in chapter ten only in that it traces a specific line – the line to Abraham. It is Abraham who would be the instrument God would use to bless all of humanity and keep His promise.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis record God dealing with humanity as a whole. Even the covenant God made with Noah impacted all of creation. Up to this point, God had still not yet made it clear how or through whom He intended to keep His promise of deliverance and redemption, but it is in Genesis 12 that the outline of Scripture truly begins to take shape. Out of the shadows emerges God’s grand plan of the ages.

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Genesis 12:1-3

The Abrahamic Covenant

If there is a single passage which provides the setting for the remainder of Scripture, it is Genesis 12:1-3, God’s promise to Abraham. In the previous chapters of Genesis, God dealt with mankind on a more general basis. In chapter twelve He chooses one man and directs all of His work with mankind through one promise – the Abrahamic Covenant:

Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land I will show you; and I will make you a great nation and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; 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 shall be blessed’ (12:1-3).

It is important to note that while this covenant was indeed unconditional (once ratified, it was not dependent upon anyone other than God, since He instituted no conditions which could negate the promises He made), it did hinge initially upon Abraham’s obedience to the imperative “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house to the land which I will show you.” Abraham was told essentially to leave all that he had known and if he was obedient to this one thing, the covenant would be set in motion. He did, and it was.

The Abrahamic Covenant contains seven specific promises with three general elements.

The seven promises are:

1. I will make you a great nation.
2. I will bless you.
3. [I will] make your name great.
4. You shall be a blessing.
5. I will bless those who bless you.
6. The one who curses you I will curse.

7. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

The three general elements are:

1. people
2. land
3. kingdom

The Promises

1. I will make you a great nation.

This promise requires that the three elements be in place – a nation cannot be great without people, land, and a kingdom. God’s promise entailed innumerable descendants for Abraham, a splendid land (which God would show him), and what would ultimately be an eternal kingdom.

2. I will bless you.

The promises were not general as God’s promises were previously. Rather than being aimed at mankind as a whole, this promise was directed at a specific individual.

3. [I will] make your name great.

The blessing upon Abraham would be so magnificent that his name would be highly regarded and meaningful in the ages to come.

4. You shall be a blessing.

Not only would Abraham himself be blessed, but also he would be a blessing to others. In what specific ways and to whom is not defined here, but at the end of 12:3 this blessing shall be expanded and further defined.
5. *I will bless those who bless you.*

In addition to the blessings for Abraham and those whom he would be a blessing to, there was a special blessing from God for those who also blessed Abraham. Abraham would hold a special place in the heart of God, and be treated with unique esteem.

6. *The one who curses you I will curse.*

In contrast to the blessing for those who bless Abraham is a curse for those who curse him. This will become evident as nations are judged harshly for their treatment of the nation that Abraham fathered.

7. *In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

This seventh promise affects not just those who bless or curse, but it will impact people from every nation. Again, no specifics are yet given, but it is evident that not only would Abraham be a blessing (the fourth promise) but through him the entire world would be blessed. It is in this seventh promise that God’s earlier promise of redemption (Genesis 3:15) would be kept.

**The Elements**

1. *People*

   Genesis 13:16 expands on this element:

   And 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.

2. *Land*

   Genesis 13:14-15 is more specific regarding this element:

   ...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.

Also Genesis 15:18:

…To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates...

The land element is further expanded in Deuteronomy 30.

3. Kingdom

Explanation of this element is not found with specificity until it is completely unfurled in the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7. From this point forward, every word of Scripture points forward to the gradual, literal, and complete fulfillment of each of the promises in this covenant.

**Genesis 12:1-25:11**

**God Relates To Abraham**

God initiated His relationship with Abraham by making a covenant with him. Genesis 12:1-25:11 contains the account of the rest of Abraham’s life – an account that further illustrates God’s character as the Covenant Keeper.

God tells Abraham to leave his home and follow God to a land that God would show him. Abraham was faithful in this, yet he shows his weakness in other areas. For example, in chapter 12 he does not trust God to protect him from the Egyptians, so he lies. In chapter sixteen, Abraham does not trust God to provide him with a son as promised. As a result he takes his wife’s Egyptian maid as a concubine and she bears him a son, named Ishmael. God had promised to bless Abraham’s descendants, and He indeed would bless Ishmael. Abraham’s lack of trust would cause strife for thousands of years between the descendants of Ishmael and those of Isaac. In spite of Abraham’s initial lack of trust, God kept His promise, and in Genesis 21 Isaac is born.
Even at this point, God was not finished teaching Abraham about faith. In Genesis 22 God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as an offering to God. It is worth noting that never elsewhere in Scripture does God request physical human sacrifice (as was the practice of other pagan religions during Abraham’s day). God was simply putting Abraham’s faith to the test in terms he could understand, as well as providing a powerful illustration of His plan of salvation for man.

Even though he didn’t yet know what God had in store, Abraham was faithful in this. As he was about to commit the act, the Angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Christ, Himself) stops him and shows him a ram in the thicket that would take Isaac’s place. God provided an important picture of the work He would accomplish in order to bring fallen mankind back to Himself: He would give His only Son as a sacrifice. The ram in the thicket was a substitute for Isaac. Isaac was to die, but by the grace of God there was a substitute. As Scripture unfolds, it will soon become clear that Jesus Christ is the Substitute – the Redeemer who would pay for man’s sin.

As Abraham’s life comes to a close, he was “satisfied with life” (25:8), as the Lord had blessed him greatly. Even though he was not the perfect example of faith, he was an example nonetheless. Abraham began to understand that God would keep His promises, and even as he saw them begin to unfold in his lifetime (with the birth of Isaac, etc.), there was indeed much more to come. Through Abraham the promises of God can be traced, and the thread continues with Isaac.

**Genesis 15:13-14**

**The Egyptian Exile and Exodus**

As God ratifies His covenant with Abraham, He adds a bit of strange news:

> Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the
nation whom they serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions (15:13-14).

Why, after promising to give Abraham’s descendants the land would God pull them out again? He says in verse 16 that the “the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.” Amazingly, even amidst the wickedness of nations, God shows incredible patience. There was an allotted amount of sin that God would allow the Amorites to commit, and then it would be over. At the right time He would restore the descendants of Abraham to the land, thereby judging the Amorite. That promise is fulfilled in Egypt shortly after Joseph’s time.

**Genesis 15:18-21**

**The Land Covenant**

God adds yet another measure of precision to His covenant with Abraham when He says,

To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 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 (15:18-21).

The Land Covenant unquestionably required a literal and physical fulfillment. The boundaries included in this promise are boundaries that Israel to this day has never attained. But God demonstrates patience and a methodical accomplishment of His plan to the extent of completion. His promise will not fail. The descendants of Abraham, through Isaac, will dwell in the land into eternity.

The specific nations mentioned become significant particularly when the nation of Israel begins her conquest of the land. How will Israel handle these nations? Will it be in accordance with the instruction of the Lord, or will she fall short? This is a key element
of the history of Israel, and the question is answered in the latter part of Joshua and the early part of Judges.

**Genesis 16:10-14**

The Promise Regarding Ishmael

In God’s covenant with Abraham, God promised to bless him and make a great nation from him. Abraham tried to assist God, becoming the father of Ishmael. This was a faithless act that would generate substantial conflict throughout the ages. We often recognize Abraham for his faith, but we must also not forget his faithlessness and the consequences it brought.

Because Ishmael was a son of Abraham, God promised to Hagar, Ishmael’s mother, that He would bless Ishmael:

I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count...Behold you are with child, and you shall bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. And he will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of his brothers (16:10-12).

Ishmael would be the father of a great nation, a nation of violence and strife. An epic ages-long struggle was about to begin.

**Genesis 17:17-21**

The Promise Regarding Isaac

Ishmael would be blessed by God, but he was not the son through whom God would carry out His Abrahamic Covenant:

And I will bless her [Sarah], and indeed I will give you a son by her...and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold I will bless him, and will make him
fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly...But My covenant I will establish with Isaac... (17:16b, 19, 20-21a).

Abraham found the promise of a son born to him and Sarah in their old age difficult to fathom, yet God had made the promise, and He intended to keep it. The covenant would be established through Isaac, not Ishmael. As a result of Abraham’s failure, there has been war between the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael ever since, and will be until the Abrahamic Covenant sees its final fulfillment.

Genesis 25
From Isaac to Jacob

Abraham’s two sons, Isaac and Ishmael would play a vital role in world history. In chapter twenty-five we find that Ishmael did indeed become the father of a nation and that he brought strife early on. “He settled in defiance of all his relatives” (25:18). God’s promise regarding Ishmael was fulfilled, but it was through Isaac that God would fulfill His covenant with Abraham. Isaac became the father of two sons, Esau and Jacob. They were born a very short time apart from each other, with Esau being the firstborn, and therefore having the rights of inheritance as the firstborn. But God had a different plan, as He told Rebekah:

Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger (25:23).

Esau placed little value on his inheritance, as he willingly gave it away for some stew (25:25).

Isaac, like his father had a problem with trusting God. He acted in the same manner as Abraham, lying to protect himself in Egypt. This lack of trust notwithstanding, God still kept His promises through these men. As Isaac neared the end of his days he sought to bless his son Esau, for he loved him. It was through Esau that Isaac wished for God to keep His promises. But even in
Isaac’s desire to bless Esau, the sovereignty of God is evident. God used Jacob’s ambitious and deceptive spirit to place a dying father’s blessing on Jacob. Isaac, try though he may, could not alter the will of God.

Once again, God had chosen a man to be chosen, and another He chose not to be chosen. God at first chose Isaac, and now He chooses Jacob. As the covenant promises become more specific, so too does the line through whom they would be kept. That the covenant promises would be kept through the line of Jacob becomes even more evident in the next promises God makes.

**Genesis 28:10-17**  
**God’s Promise to Jacob**

...I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and your descendants. Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall 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. And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you (28:13-15).

Here the previous covenants are made more specific. It is now clear that the covenants run through Jacob. Here God reiterates the Land Covenant, as well as the seventh promise of the Abrahamic Covenant – that all families of the earth shall be blessed through Abraham’s seed, and now, specifically through Jacob’s.

Jacob was also granted a unique relationship with God to this point, even resulting in his name being changed to *Israel* (32:24-28). Israel would become father to twelve sons who would become the mighty nation named after their father. Through them, the promises would unfold further still.