**THE NATURE OIF THE PROMISE**

One of the most foundational aspects of Old Testament theology is the promise given to Abraham and reiterated to his descendants. The theme of promise is interwoven throughout the Old and New Testaments.

The first statement of the promise to Abraham followed God’s command that he leave Ur of the Chaldees and set out for the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:1). The events surrounding that journey mark one of the most monumental periods in human history.

These are the terms of the promise given in Genesis 12:2,3

**2**“*I will make you into a great nation,
    and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
    and you will be a blessing.****3****I will bless those who bless you,
    and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
    will be blessed through you*.”

The promise relates not only to Abraham but to all humanity. The promises relating specifically to Abraham are that he will become a great nation (12:2), that he will be blessed (12:2) and that his name will be great (12:2).

The elements of the promise extending beyond Abraham are that he will be a blessing (12:2), that God will show favour to those who favour him (12:3) and disfavour to those who don’t (12:3) and that all peoples of the earth will be blessed through him (12:3).

This last element is not universalism – that all humanity is included in the saving benefits of the promise. That God blesses some and curses others (12:3) precludes that possibility; and faith is clearly the prerequisite for receiving the benefits of the promise. This final part of the promise is a promise that the benefits will extend beyond the Jewish people to include Gentiles as well.

When Abraham’s pilgrimage took him to Canaan, an aspect of the promise was refined and amplified in the words ‘*To your offspring I will give this land’* (12:7). This was implicit in the earlier words ‘*I will make you into a great nation’* (12:2). It refined the earlier statement by more narrowly defining the ‘*great nation’* as Abraham’s offspring and it amplified the statement by designating the land of Canaan as the country in which his posterity would become a nation.

The promise was again affirmed when Abraham was ninety-nine (Genesis 17:1-8). It was in this restatement that Abraham’s name was changed from Abram to Abraham (17:5).

A significant addition in the Genesis 17 restatement is the concept of divine-human relationship in the words ‘*to be your God and the God of your descendants after you’* (12:7), repeated in the summary in the next verse (17:8) ‘*I will be their God.*’ It is in this concept that Abraham was told that kings would descend from him.

Bringing this together, the Abrahamic promise includes:

* the promise of offspring
* the promise of blessing for Abraham
* the promise that Abraham’s name would be great
* the promise of blessing for those who favour Abraham and disfavour for those who don’t
* the promise that Abraham’s descendants would occupy the land of Canaan
* the promise of divine blessing for Gentiles
* the promise that God would be the God of those who comprise Abraham’s offspring
* the promise that kings would descend from Abraham

The promise given to Abraham was an eternal promise (Genesis 13:15; 17:7,8,13,19). It would be administered forever, extending its blessings to all the people of faith throughout the ages.

This study is a summary of ‘*The Covenants of Promise’* by T. E. McComiskey, (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 1988, pp.15-17)