

Prosperity Under The Abrahamic Covenant

The covenant which God made with Abraham included promises of earthly prosperity for those under it. In Genesis 12:7, 13:14-17 and 17:8, the Lord promised to give him and his physical descendants the land of Canaan and the earthly benefits associated with this. In Genesis 12:2, God promised to bless Abraham. God's promises to Abraham were based on His grace and mercy.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, their families and descendants did not fully deserve to receive such blessings. Prior to turning to the Lord, Abraham had served false gods (see Joshua 24:2-3). Study Genesis 12:1-50:26 to see the various sins which manifested in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their families. None of them deserved prosperity from God as a totally deserved reward.

Actually some of Jacob's sons do not seem to have had saving faith in God and committed much wickedness. Initially, nine of Jacob's sons planned to murder Joseph their brother, but then they sold him as a slave (see Genesis 37:12-28). Judah had sex with whom he thought was a pagan religious prostitute (see Genesis 38:15-22). Simeon and Levi were very cruel (see Genesis 49:5-7).

In Deuteronomy 9:4-6, God emphasised to Abraham's later descendants He was not giving them the land of Canaan because of any supposed righteousness in them: ***“Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land’; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.”***

Abraham prospered by God's grace through faith. But note he did not earn or deserve prosperity through his faith. His faith did not precede God's promises of prosperity. Instead God first promised him prosperity and Abraham responded with trusting faith (see Genesis 12:1-9, Hebrews 11:8 and Genesis 15:1-6). Therefore Abraham's faith was *not the purchase price* of prosperity.

Some of the promises of blessings and prosperity in the Abrahamic Covenant are *unconditional*. In other words, God promised to prosper Abraham and his descendants regardless of whether they had faith in Him or not. For example, God's promises to give Abraham multitudes of descendants (see Genesis 13:16, 15:5, and 17:6) and to bless all the families on Earth through him (see Genesis 12:3) were *unconditional*. But some of God's promises of blessings in the Abrahamic Covenant were *conditional* on whether Abraham and his descendants had faith in Him (see Hebrews 6:12-15) and whether they obeyed His revealed will under the Abrahamic Covenant (see Genesis 18:19).

The Abrahamic Covenant continued to operate even through the later Mosaic Covenant era. So on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant, God often by His grace blessed Abraham's physical descendants throughout the Mosaic Covenant period up to the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. This is despite the fact none of these people deserved such blessings. They really deserved the curses of the Law because of their sins.

Galatians 3:7-9 and 13-14 show God regards those who are not physical descendants of Abraham but who have faith in Jesus Christ, as Abraham's spiritual children and as recipients of the blessings of grace which God promised in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Prosperity by grace for unbelieving Israelites

The Israelites who left Egypt in the Exodus are a classic example of God prospering people by *pure undeserved grace* and *not as a totally or even partially deserved reward*. Exodus 12:35-36 records: ***“Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.”***

In Hebrew, the word **“favor”** above is the word “hen’ which means “grace”.¹ The word “hen” is also used in Exodus 3:21 and 11:3 when referring to this same event of God prospering the Israelites because of His totally undeserved grace.

As revealed in Exodus 12:35-36, the only God-given condition the Israelites had to fulfil was asking the Egyptians for the articles of silver, gold and clothing. By asking for these articles, the Israelites did not *merit* these earthly blessings from God.

In this specific example, God did not even set faith as the condition for these Israelites to receive this unmerited grace expression of prosperity. Instead He prospered them *enormously* despite them being so unbelieving. They were the same people who continually later rebelled against Him. Hebrews 3:16-19 refers to them. Moses, Joshua and Caleb were not included among these rebellious unbelievers.

Joshua 24:14 reveals that many or most of these Israelites had been serving pagan gods while in Egypt: ***“...and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord!”*** Ezekiel 20:6-8 records similar things: ***“On that day I lifted My hand in an oath to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands. Then I said to them, ‘Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God’. But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt...”***

So most of the Israelites who left Egypt were prospered by God greatly at that time through His grace and mercy even though they had *no living faith in Him*.

One of the reasons some Christians have wrongly believed that God prospered the Israelites when they left Egypt as a deserved reward is because of the use of the words **“plunder”** in Exodus 3:22 and **“plundered”** in Exodus 12:36. Usually “plunder” is what an army earns or deserves through its efforts to defeat an enemy.

¹ Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 336 and Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 302.

But note in the case of the Israelites in Egypt, they did not fight. *God did all their fighting for them* (see Exodus 3:1-14:31). As a result, in a figurative sense God won the plunder of battle. Then in totally undeserved grace, He gave this plunder to totally undeserving Israelites.

God owns all created things anyway (see 1 Chronicles 29:10-11 and Psalm 27:1). So He can give them to whomever He chooses. But it is still true in a symbolic sense, He won the plunder of the battle against the Egyptians and their false gods.

Note God's prospering of the Israelites occurred *before* the Mosaic Covenant was given and was a *manifestation* of God's totally undeserved grace under the *Abrahamic Covenant*.

Misusing the Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant is partially fulfilled in the New Covenant (see Galatians 3:16). Because of this fact, some believers may think this means God is obligated to make every believer as rich as Abraham and Jacob. They may reason the following way: "God promised the Land of Canaan and the cities, resources and animals on this land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Land of Canaan and its resources is worth multiplied billions and billions of dollars. The Abrahamic Covenant is partially fulfilled in the New Covenant. Therefore, God promises to make all New Covenant believers at least millionaires and maybe even billionaires."

But this is ridiculous Biblical interpretation. The Abrahamic Covenant's promises about the Land of Canaan were not just made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These promises were made to them and their physical descendants – the Israelites (see Genesis 17:7-8). The Land of Canaan and its wealth were to be *divided* among *many millions* of later Israelites. Once the land and its resources were divided among millions, the result was not every Israelite becoming billionaires.

It would be just as foolish interpreting Romans 4:13 to mean God guarantees that every individual believer during their earthly life will own all of the wealth on planet Earth. Romans 4:13 states God promised Abraham he would be the heir of the world: "***For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.***" If one believer owned all of the wealth on Earth, then no other believers could own anything on Earth.

Bauer says that in the context of Romans 4:13, the word "***world***" here in Greek means "the earth, the planet upon which we live".² Romans 4:13 refers to Abraham and his seed or descendants being the heir to the world. In context, this refers to Abraham and his spiritual descendants – all those with saving faith in God among Abraham's physical descendants and among other nations – being heirs to the Earth.

This promise in Romans 4:13 is beginning to be fulfilled now during the Church age and will be completed after Jesus' Second Coming. But because it is based on *totally undeserved grace* and is not a totally deserved reward for perfect obedience to the Mosaic Law, God has the liberty to decide *in what measure, when, how and in what ways* that He will impart such natural blessings to believers during the Church age. Therefore, those who promise believers that they can be guaranteed to be millionaires or billionaires through the Abrahamic Covenant are deceiving others.

² Bauer, page 446.

Joseph is a classic example of someone with *very strong faith* in God and living under the *grace-based* Abrahamic Covenant, who received a version of God-given prosperity that many modern Christians may not regard as prosperity. Joseph was sold into the bondage of slavery by his own brothers (see Genesis 37:12-36). Most of them had wanted to kill him, but Reuben and Judah persuaded them otherwise (see Genesis 37:21-27).

Imagine what rejection and grief Joseph must have experienced when thinking about what they did to him, about his future as a slave and the possibility of never seeing his father and brother Benjamin again. Being a slave in ancient times was an extremely difficult experience. Slaves could be raped, sold, starved, whipped, beaten or killed at the whim of their masters. They were fed and clothed only to the standard their masters decided.

After the slave traders sold Joseph to an officer of the Pharaoh of Egypt, God prospered Joseph (see Genesis 39:2-3). But note such prosperity was still within the context of being owned by a human master, cut off from his family and not being free to choose his own wife, future or anything else.

Then the Egyptian officer's wife offered to commit adultery with Joseph. But Joseph's faith-filled answer to her was "***How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?***"

According to much modern false teaching, Joseph should have been rewarded for this faith and obedience with immediate freedom. But instead God allowed this evil woman to cause him to be thrown into Pharaoh's gaol.

Gaols in ancient times were horrendous places of hardship and suffering. They were not holiday homes like many modern gaols in Western countries. Note even in such a place of dreadful hardship, God prospered Joseph (see Genesis 39:21-23). Joseph was then kept in prison for *at least two years* for crimes he had never committed (see Genesis 41:1). Joseph was *not being prospered in a paradise*.

Does your version of prosperity under the Abrahamic Covenant include the possibility of being hated and rejected by most of your family members, being sold into slavery and sentenced to prison for at least two years for crimes you did not commit? Remember Joseph was the *most spiritual man of faith* among his brothers. So he did not suffer these things because of some supposed lack of faith nor because he had more sins than his brothers and others.

One Biblically imbalanced version of prosperity teaching only focuses on the type of prosperity Joseph received after Pharaoh made him second-in-command of Egypt (see Genesis 41:37-50:26). Such teaching does not mention the type of prosperity God gave Joseph earlier.

Referring to his earlier very difficult life, Joseph said in Genesis 50:20 to his brothers who had sold him as a slave: "***But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.***" Joseph spoke similar words of *great faith* in Genesis 45:5-7. Can you and I say the same about the times of difficulties and hardships we have experienced in our lives?