

Promise to Fulfillment: Unit 4 – Abraham and the Children of Promise: Gen 15 (in the Biblical Setting)

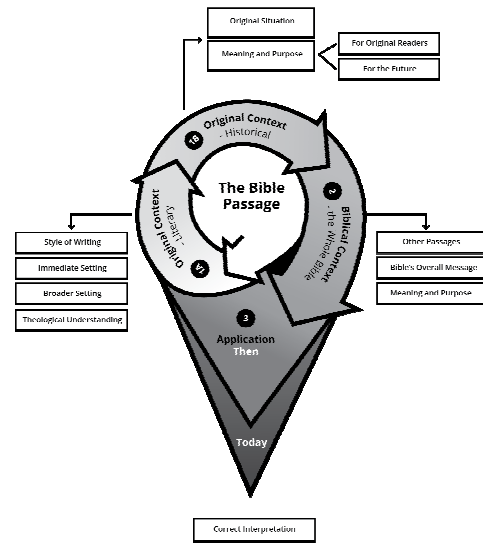
Introduction

The purpose of this unit is to:

- Return to Genesis 15 and use the model for Interpreting the Bible to understand the *Biblical Context*.

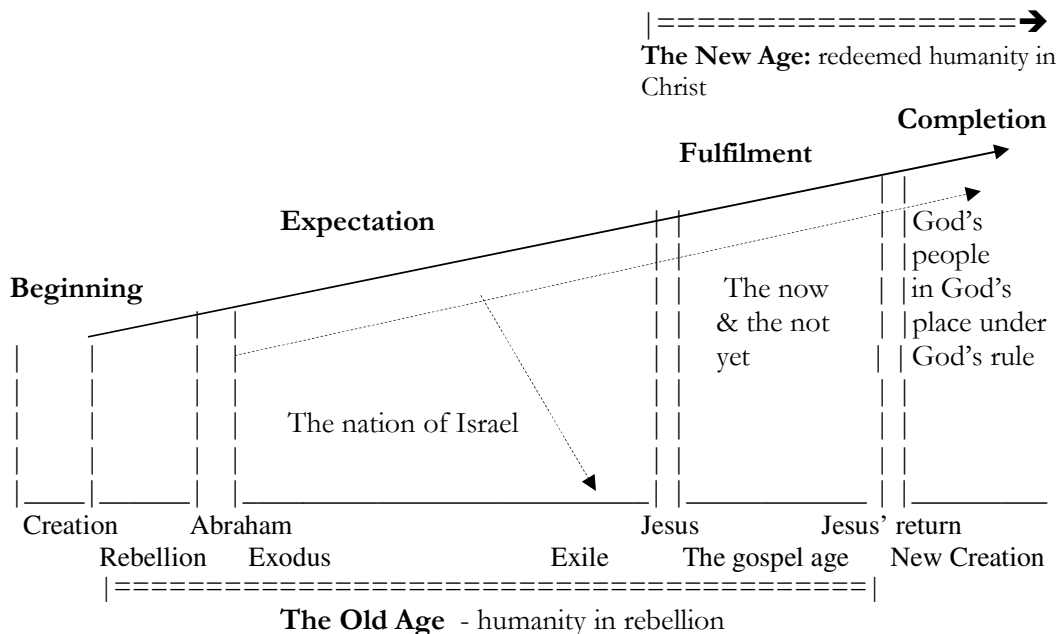
So Far...

- We have looked at the *Bible Passage* and then attempted to understand the *Original Context* by looking at the Literary and Historical features in and around the passage.
- Much of our work so far has aimed to locate the passage in its own time.



Biblical Context

- Now we want to understand the passage in the *context of the Whole Bible*. To do this we will trace verses and themes that appear in our passage (Genesis 15) through the rest of the Old Testament and into the New Testament.
- It is helpful to place our passage into the Salvation History Timeline which we considered in Unit 1.



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Question:

Where does Genesis 15 fit into the Salvation History Timeline?

- Notice that the movement of Salvation History goes from...

Historical Beginnings	The Prophets looking forward	The Promises being fulfilled	The New Creation
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Beginning → Expectation → Fulfillment → Consummation

- It is this movement that will structure our efforts to understand any passage in its *Biblical Context*.
- What we want to bring to mind is:

1. Any other passages in scripture that will help us understand our passage (Genesis 15).

Historical Beginnings

- As Genesis 15 is so close to the beginning of the Bible, we have already considered the historical beginnings when we looked to place the passage in its Original Context – so there is little new work here.

The Prophets looking forward (Expectation)

- As we look forward, there are several passages that come to mind.
- Abraham's son, Isaac, was followed by two further generations by which time Israel had become numerous. Enter the period of Exodus under Moses – a numerous people head off to find the promised land which after a delayed start they take hold of under the leadership of Joshua.
- What follows is a period under the guidance of Judges until eventually the period of the Kings comes into focus. Abraham's descendants are numerous. They have a great land, they are known, they are blessed and at times they are a blessing to other nations.

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1 Kings 4:20-34

²⁰The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. ²¹And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life.

²²Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors of the finest flour and sixty cors of meal, ²³ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl. ²⁴For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphshah to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. ²⁵During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree.

²⁶Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses.

²⁷The district governors, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking. ²⁸They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses.

²⁹God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. ³²He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. ³³He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. ³⁴From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

Question:

What from 1 Kings 4:20-34 reminds or fulfills what we have in Genesis 15?

- This time of peace and prosperity is short lived. Israel continued to rebel and failed to follow the ways that God has set out for them. Eventually the kingdom divided and the other nations came in and overthrew them carrying them off into exile. What of the promises of God?
- The period of the Prophets begins – and it is through the words of the prophets that God's promises are renewed.

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Jeremiah 5:1-19

*"Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem,
look around and consider,
search through her squares.*

*If you can find but one person
who deals honestly and seeks the truth,
I will forgive this city.*

² *Although they say, 'As surely as the LORD lives,'
still they are swearing falsely."*

³ *LORD, do not your eyes look for truth?
You struck them, but they felt no pain;
you crushed them, but they refused correction.
They made their faces harder than stone
and refused to repent.*

⁴ *I thought, "These are only the poor;
they are foolish,
for they do not know the way of the LORD,
the requirements of their God.*

⁵ *So I will go to the leaders
and speak to them;
surely they know the way of the LORD,
the requirements of their God."
But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke
and torn off the bonds.*

⁶ *Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them,
a wolf from the desert will ravage them,
a leopard will lie in wait near their towns
to tear to pieces any who venture out,
for their rebellion is great
and their backslidings many.*

⁷ *"Why should I forgive you?
Your children have forsaken me
and sworn by gods that are not gods.
I supplied all their needs,
yet they committed adultery
and thronged to the houses of prostitutes.*

⁸ *They are well-fed, lusty stallions,
each neighing for another man's wife.*

⁹ *Should I not punish them for this?"
declares the LORD.*

*"Should I not avenge myself
on such a nation as this?*

¹⁰ *"Go through her vineyards and ravage them,
but do not destroy them completely.
Strip off her branches,
for these people do not belong to the LORD.*

¹¹ *The people of Israel and the people of Judah
have been utterly unfaithful to me,"
declares the LORD.*

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¹² *They have lied about the LORD;
they said, "He will do nothing!"*

*No harm will come to us;
we will never see sword or famine.*

¹³ *The prophets are but wind
and the word is not in them;
so let what they say be done to them."*

¹⁴ *Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says:*

*"Because the people have spoken these words,
I will make my words in your mouth a fire
and these people the wood it consumes.*

¹⁵ *People of Israel," declares the LORD,
"I am bringing a distant nation against you—
an ancient and enduring nation,
a people whose language you do not know,
whose speech you do not understand.*

¹⁶ *Their quivers are like an open grave;
all of them are mighty warriors.*

¹⁷ *They will devour your harvests and food,
devour your sons and daughters;
they will devour your flocks and herds,
devour your vines and fig trees.*

*With the sword they will destroy
the fortified cities in which you trust.*

¹⁸ *"Yet even in those days," declares the LORD, "I will not destroy you
completely. ¹⁹ And when the people ask, 'Why has the LORD our God done all
this to us?' you will tell them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign
gods in your own land, so now you will serve foreigners in a land not your
own.'*

Exercise:

Read through Jeremiah 5:1-19 - there is both judgement and hope.

- Why the judgement? What is the hope?

- Do any of the Abrahamic Promises have any bearing on this passage?
How?

- 300 years after the reign of Solomon, the prophet Jeremiah speaks to Judah and warns of the coming exile. Israel has worked its way in sin, in rebellion against God's word, in practicing idolatry, in immorality and social injustice to a point where they were a stench to God. God's judgement against them appears to undo the fulfillment of his promises – they are destroyed as a nation, they are reduced to a remnant, they lost their land, they no longer enjoy the blessings of God.
- What of the promises of God?

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- And Isaiah also speaks to Israel and speaks into the time of the exile.

Exercise:

Read Isaiah 60.

It speaks to a scattered Israel – what of the promises of God? What of the future of Israel?

Isaiah 60 (but in particular verse 1-3)

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.*

² *See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.*

³ *Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn....*

*....“Although you have been forsaken and hated,
with no one traveling through,
I will make you the everlasting pride
and the joy of all generations.*

¹⁶ *You will drink the milk of nations
and be nursed at royal breasts.*

*Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior,
your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.*

¹⁷ *Instead of bronze I will bring you gold,
and silver in place of iron.*

*Instead of wood I will bring you bronze,
and iron in place of stones.*

*I will make peace your governor
and well-being your ruler.*

¹⁸ *No longer will violence be heard in your land,
nor ruin or destruction within your borders,
but you will call your walls Salvation
and your gates Praise.*

¹⁹ *The sun will no more be your light by day,
nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you,
for the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.*

²⁰ *Your sun will never set again,
and your moon will wane no more;
the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your days of sorrow will end.*

²¹ *Then all your people will be righteous
and they will possess the land forever.
They are the shoot I have planted,*

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*the work of my hands,
for the display of my splendor.
²² The least of you will become a thousand,
the smallest a mighty nation.
I am the LORD;
in its time I will do this swiftly."*

- Isaiah's theme is how the Lord will keep his promises and restore his people (despite their unfaithfulness).
- He speaks of a glorious future for the descendants of Abraham, a future better than even during the time of David and Solomon, a future that will go on forever (c.f. 60:18-22)
- What of the promises of God?
- The major and minor Prophets all have a message of judgement and yet hope. Judgement because Israel continued in faith to keep the covenant they made with God, and hope because God never failed to keep his covenant with his people. (c.f. Ezek 36:22-38; Amos 9:11-15; Zech 8:12-23; Isaiah 65:17-25).

The Promises being fulfilled (Fulfillment)

- So we keep looking forward now into the New Testament. Our intention is to see how God is working to fulfill the promises that we see described in Genesis 15. We want to see where God's dealings with Abraham and his descendants are specifically carried into the New Testament.
- Of course it is here where we meet Jesus.

Discussion:

When moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament, how do we know where to look?

Matthew 1:1-17

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

² *Abraham was the father of Isaac,*

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³ *Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,*

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ *Ram the father of Amminadab,*

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

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*Nahshon the father of Salmon,
⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
 Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
 Obed the father of Jesse,
⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.
 David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,
⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
 Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
 Abijah the father of Asa,
⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
 Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
 Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham,
 Jotham the father of Ahaz,
 Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
 Manasseh the father of Amon,
 Amon the father of Josiah,
¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.
¹² After the exile to Babylon:
 Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
 Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
 Abihud the father of Eliakim,
 Eliakim the father of Azor,
¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok,
 Zadok the father of Akim,
 Akim the father of Elihud,
¹⁵ Elihud the father of Eleazar,
 Eleazar the father of Matthan,
 Matthan the father of Jacob,
¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.
¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.*

Question:

What can we gain from the genealogy of Matthew 1:1-17 that relates to Genesis 15? (c.f. also Luke 1:54-55, 67-75)

Romans 3:21-4:25

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,

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through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰ since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹ Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

⁴ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

*⁷ “Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.*

*⁸ Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”*

⁹ Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. ¹² And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

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¹⁸Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

¹⁹Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

²²This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." ²³The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Questions:

What of Genesis 15 does the Apostle Paul quote to the Romans? What is the point he is making?

Why go to Abraham?

Galatians 3:6-9

⁶So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

⁷Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

⁸Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." ⁹So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

- In Jesus the promises to Abraham find their fulfillment – God's purpose, fulfilled through a son, calling people to a saving faith.
- What was asked of Abraham is what is asked of any child of God – Jew or Gentile right to this day.

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The New Creation (Consummation)

- Finally, we look even further forward. How are the promises, already fulfilled in Jesus, consummated in the coming New Creation?

Revelation 7

7 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ³ “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” ⁴ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

*⁵ From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,
from the tribe of Gad 12,000,
⁶ from the tribe of Asher 12,000,
from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000,
from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,
⁷ from the tribe of Simeon 12,000,
from the tribe of Levi 12,000,
from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,
⁸ from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,
from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.*

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

*“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”*

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying:

*“Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honour
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”*

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

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¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore,

“they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne
will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ ‘Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.
The sun will not beat down on them,’
nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb at the centre of the throne
will be their shepherd;
‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’
‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

Questions:

In verse 4-8 what does the number 144,000 represent?

In verse 9, what of Genesis 12:3 is fulfilled?

What does verses 10-17 say that complete what we have been expecting since Genesis 15?

- In order to understand the *Biblical Context* we have considered *other passages* which in some way may inform or be informed by our passage and we have looked at those passages in the context of the *Bible’s Overall Message* by moving through the salvation stages of the Bible.
- And so we can ask:

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2. What is the Meaning and Purpose of our Passage (Genesis 15)?

- The truths found in the passage sit in the context of Salvation History for a reason. They belong to God's complete revelation and so it is wise to think about why God has done and said what he has.
- The themes come to their *fulfillment* in Jesus Christ and they will come to *completion* in the New Creation.
- This means we are in a position to work out the Meaning and Purpose of our passage for every time.
- In relation to Genesis 15, we have learned:
 - God's salvation plan can be understood through the promises that he makes.
 - Genesis 15 helps us to understand the promises God makes and his intention to keep his promises.
 - Isaac, the son promised to Abraham, foreshadows Jesus Christ the true descendant of Abraham.
 - Abraham believed the promises revealed and acted upon them in faith.
 - Faith is the right and only response – to which God declares a person righteous.
 - The *expectation* of the promises is that God would save. The *fulfillment* of those promises is that Jesus saved. The *consummation* of those promises is that those in Christ will enjoy the blessings of those salvation promises.
 - All believers (those who put their faith in Jesus Christ) are the children of Abraham.
 - The purpose of Genesis 15 is to strengthen Abraham's faith. And accordingly to strengthen the faith of those who follow him.
- Knowing the meaning and purpose of a passage in both its original context and its biblical context means we are in a very good place to apply the passage – then and today.
- *Application* is the next stage of correctly interpreting a passage.

For next Week: Read PTC Unit 5.