

Divine Covenants...the basis for a plan of salvation...
A Series on Divine Covenants: Part 1

1. Study Joshua 24:2. How did people worship God during Abram's youth? Were there any true disciples / priests of God then?

From the time of Noah's Ark to Abraham, man failed to recognize and worship God properly. Leading to the city of Babel, people spoke the same language and, as they attempted to make a name for themselves by building a large city with a tower to reach the heavens, God judged this sin of pride. As the result, people were scattered and given different languages about the earth (Gen 11:1-9). Generations later, Abram's family continued the practice of pagan worship. There were, however, some true priests of God that were present then. Melchizedek, king and priest of Salem, was one such example (Gen 14:18-20). But there wasn't any formal written record of an established form of worship for God. It was all passed down through oral communication and tradition.

2. There are several passages that record the promises God made with Abraham. With careful observation of the details, one can gain a full understanding of this fundamental covenant. Examine carefully Genesis 12:1-4; 13:14-18; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; and 22:15-18. What are your observations of all of God's Promises?

The promise made in Haran:

Now the Lord said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which 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 will be blessed.**"
So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. (Gen 12:1-4)

Genesis 12:1-4. Without seeing Him, Abram obeys the voice of God and leaves Haran. For a faith that engenders obedience, God promises Abram: a) a great nation, b) God's blessings, c) Abram will be renowned, d) God will protect him, and e) Abram will be a blessing and through him, the world will be blessed.

The promise made in Canaan:

The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "**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. 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.** Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord. (Gen 13:14-18)

Genesis 13:14-18. After arriving in Canaan, God promises Abram: a) all the land he can see north, south, east and west to him and his descendants forever, and b) innumerable descendants.

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The promise at covenant ratification:

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying,

“Do not fear, Abram,

I am a shield to you;

Your reward shall be very great.”

Abram said, “O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.” Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He took him outside and said, “**Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.**” **And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”** Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. And He said to him, “**I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.**” He said, “O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?” So He said to him, “Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, “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 will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying,

“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.” (Gen 15:1-21)

Genesis 15:1-21. After meeting with Melchizedek king of Salem, priest of God Most High, Abram received the word of God through a vision: a) God is Abram’s protector, b) Abram’s reward will be great, c) though childless, Abram will have a son, d) his descendants will be uncountable, and e) Abram will receive and possess the promised land.

To assure Abram of His covenant promises, God has Abram set up the covenant ratification ceremony, and after Abram is in a deep sleep, God ratifies the covenant unilaterally and unconditionally with Himself. Once the covenant is ratified, God defines the boundaries of the Promised Land set aside for Abram’s descendants as between the Nile and Euphrates rivers.

The promise and assurance that Abram’s wife will bear a son:

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Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him,

“I am God Almighty;
Walk before Me, and be blameless.
**“I will establish My covenant between Me and you,
And I will multiply you exceedingly.”**

Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying,

“As for Me, behold, **My covenant is with you,
And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.**
“No longer shall your name be called Abram,
But **your name shall be Abraham;**
For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

God said further to Abraham, **“Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.** And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but **Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.**” Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!” But God said, “No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. **As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.**” When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. (Gen 17:1-21)

Genesis 17:1-21. One year before his son Isaac is born, God repeats His promises to Abram: a) Abram will have exceedingly numerous descendants, b) Abram’s name will change to Abraham, because he will be the father of a multitude of nations and kings and Sarai will be Sarah, c) Abraham’s covenant will not die with him, but will be established everlasting with his descendants, and God will be their God, d) his descendants will have an everlasting possession of the Land, and God will be their God.

The promises as the result of Abraham’s obedience:

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Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided."

Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed **I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.**" So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba. (Gen 22:9-19)

Genesis 22:9-19. That Abraham would sacrifice his only son with his wife in obedience to God is remarkable; Abraham faith was exceptional, and he feared to disobey God's word. In contrast to tempting someone to sin which God would never do (Jam 1:13), God was testing Abraham's faith (1 Thes 2:4). Because of his obedience, it appears that Abraham was blessed even more and beyond measure, and through him, "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

3. How many wives and sons did Abraham have? With whom among Abraham's descendants was the Abrahamic Covenant confirmed?

Hagar bore Ishmael (Gen 16:4-15)

Sarah bore Isaac (Gen 18:11-15)

Keturah bore Zimram, Joshkan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (Gen 25:1-2)

Of all the women associated with Abraham, only Hagar received promises of blessing directly from God: a) "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count," b) "you shall bear a son," c) "you shall call him Ishmael," d) "he will be a wild donkey of a man," e) "his hand will be against everyone," f) "everyone's hand will be against him," g) "he will live to the east of all his brothers" (Gen 16:9-12).

Note that only two sons came to bury their father Abraham: Ishmael and Isaac (Gen 25:9-10).

God's covenant with Abraham was confirmed through Isaac (Gen 26:2-5, 24), confirmed through Isaac's second son Jacob (Gen 28:13-15), and confirmed through all 12 sons of Jacob (Gen 49). But Judah was the most appropriate to receive the covenant promise of the King.

4. What is the significance of Genesis 15:10 and Leviticus 1:14-17?

Abraham offers the birds according to the Law in Leviticus, which was written hundreds of years later; the Law of God was revealed to Abraham in greater detail than what was recorded in the Bible (Gen 26:5)!

5. What is the significance of Genesis 15:17?

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When men made covenants with each other during the time of Abraham, they would arrange the sacrificed animals, and each would walk between the animal halves. This was symbolic of the agreement that each would uphold their part of the covenant. In this case, **only** God, symbolized by the smoking oven and a flaming torch, walked between the animal halves. The Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. This means that this covenant all depended upon God and did not require anything of Abraham. **Only God, by Himself, made and was bound by His own covenant!**

It is significant that there is no other divine covenant that is repeated as many as five times in the Bible. The Abrahamic Covenant makes promises a) to Abraham personally, b) to Abraham's descendants Israel, and c) indirectly to humanity (Gentiles). This covenant forms the basis from which other covenants expand upon. The Land Covenant (also known as Deuteronomic) expands upon the promise of land to Israel. The Davidic Covenant expands upon the issue of kingship and inheritance through Israel. The New Covenant expands on the promise of blessing to humanity.

The Bible considers Abraham as one of the greatest examples of faith (Rom 4:1-3); *faith that obeys God*. Moreover, Abraham never saw the complete fulfillment of all of the covenant blessings in his lifetime; other aspects of it were fulfilled later! The unconditional Abrahamic Covenant is eternal; David believed that it was still in effect (1 Chron 16:15-18) as well as the Apostle Peter (Acts 3:12-26).

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