

FOCUS: ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

God's activities demonstrate His nature and purpose, and provide guidance to His people.

A covenant is a binding and solemn agreement made by two or more individuals, parties, etc. to do or keep from doing a specified thing; compact.¹ There are two types of covenants: conditional and unconditional. A conditional or bilateral covenant is an agreement that is binding on both parties for its fulfillment. Both parties agree to fulfill certain conditions. If either party fails to meet their responsibilities, the covenant is broken and neither party has to fulfill the expectations of the covenant. An unconditional or unilateral covenant is an agreement between two parties, but only one of the two parties has to do something. Nothing is required of the other party.

A common fallacy is that God has made completely different covenants in Old Testament times and in the New Testament era, as if God had made a mistake with ancient Israel and failed them, and is now trying to correct the blunders with a New Covenant. The truth is that God is reliable and trustworthy and does not make mistakes. He deals fairly and consistently and the covenants illustrate these qualities. His Covenant with mankind throughout history is neither fragmented nor capricious.²

The Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. This covenant guarantees everlasting blessings upon Abraham, his seed, and all the families of the earth.³ God made promises to the man, Abraham that required nothing of Abraham. The description of the covenant is found in Genesis 12:1-3. God determined to call out a special people for Himself through whom He would bring blessing to all the nations. The Abrahamic Covenant is paramount to a proper understanding of the kingdom concept and is foundational to Old Testament theology. There are no conditions attached to the Abrahamic Covenant (no 'if' clauses, suggesting its fulfillment is dependent on man). It is also a literal covenant in which the promises should be understood literally. The land that is promised should be understood in its literal or normal interpretation (no allegory or figurative depiction intended). It is, without a doubt, an everlasting covenant. The promises that God made to Israel are eternal.

It is important to note that while this covenant was indeed

unconditional, 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.⁴

Although the actual Abrahamic Covenant is found in Genesis 12:1-3, the ceremony recorded in Genesis 15 (whole chapter), indicates the unconditional nature of the covenant. The only time that both parties of a covenant would pass between the pieces of animals was when the fulfillment of the covenant was dependent upon both parties keeping commitments. Concerning the significance of God alone moving between the halves of the animals, it is a smoking furnace and a flaming torch. These two items represented God, not Abraham, which passed between the pieces. It would seem that such an act should be shared by both parties, but it wasn't which indicated that the covenant is essentially a promise by God. God is the one who binds Himself. God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Abraham so that he would not be able to pass between the two halves of the animals. Thus, the fulfillment of the covenant fell to God alone.

There are three (3) main features to the Abrahamic Covenant:

1. **The promise of land (Genesis 12:1) calling Abraham from Ur, the land of the Chaldees, to a land that He would give him.** This promise is again recounted in Genesis 13:14-18 where it was confirmed by a shoe covenant of which its dimensions were given in Genesis 15:18-21. This fulfillment will be on this earth, not heaven. The land aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is expanded in Deuteronomy 30:1-10 (the Palestinian Covenant).
2. **The promise of descendants found in Genesis 12:2. God promised Abraham that He would make a great nation out of him.** Abraham was promised many descendants even though he was 75 years old and childless (Genesis 12:4). This promise is brought to light even more in Genesis 17:6 where God promised that nations and kings would descend from the aged patriarch. The promise would eventuate in the Davidic throne with Messiah's kingdom rule over the people of Israel (expanded in the Davidic Covenant found in 2 Samuel 7:12-16).
3. **The promise of blessing and redemption found in Genesis 12:3. Abraham's family and the families of the earth would be blessed through him according to the promise of God.** This promise is

reiterated in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34 and mentioned in Hebrews 8:6-13) and has to do with "Israel's spiritual blessing and redemption." The forgiveness of sin is anticipated in Jeremiah 31:34. The unconditional and eternal (unending) nature of the covenant is seen in that the covenant is reaffirmed to Isaac (Genesis 21:12; 26:3-4). The unconditional aspect of the covenant is seen by the "I will" promises of God. The covenant is again confirmed to Jacob (Genesis 28:14-15). Amid the sins of the patriarchs, God still reaffirmed these promises. This further emphasizes the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant.

It should be noted that the Abrahamic Covenant also contained seven specific promises with three general elements.

The three general elements are:

1. **People** - Genesis 13:16 gives us 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** - Regarding this element, Genesis 13:14-15 is more specific-"...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." Genesis 15:18 states, "...To you descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates..." Deuteronomy further expands the land element.
3. **Kingdom** - II Samuel 7 (Davidic Covenant) explains this element in detail.

The seven promises are:

1. **I will make you a great nation...**this promise requires that the three elements be in place-without people, land, and a kingdom a nation cannot be great.
2. **I will bless you...**the promises here were not general as God's Promises were previously. This promise was directed at a specific individual rather than being aimed at mankind as a whole.
3. **I will make your name great...**this blessing was so magnificent that was upon Abraham that his name would be highly regarded and meaningful in ages to come.
4. **You shall be a blessing...**Not only would Abraham be blessed, but also he would be a blessing to others.

5. **I will bless those who bless you...**there was also a special blessing form God for those who blessed Abraham. Abraham would hold a special place in the heart of God...and he would be treated with esteem and dignity.
6. **The one who curses you I will curse...**Reverse action of God will be on those who curse Abraham (curse those who curse him). Evidence of this is seen 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**⁵. ...this promise affects not just those who bless and curse, but people from every nation will feel the impact. It is in this promise (7th promise) that God's earlier promise of redemption (Genesis 3:15) will be kept.

God's method of fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant is literal, inasmuch as God partially fulfilled the covenant in history....for God blessed Abraham by giving him the land (Genesis 13:14-17), God blessed spiritually (Genesis 13:8, 18; 14:22, 23; 21:22), and God gave him numerous descendants (Genesis 22:17: 49:3-28).

However, the important element of the Abrahamic Covenant demands a future fulfillment with Messiah's kingdom rule. For instance:

- **Israel as a nation will possess the land in the future.** Numerous Old Testament passages anticipate the future blessing of Israel and her possession of the land as promised to Abraham. Ezekiel envisions a day in the future when Israel is restored to the land (Ezekiel 20:33-37, 40-42; 36:1-37:28).
- **Israel as a nation will be converted, forgiven, and restored** (Romans 11:25-27)
- **Israel will repent and receive the forgiveness of God in the future** (Zechariah 12:10-14). The Abrahamic Covenant finds its ultimate fulfillment in connection with the return of Messiah to rescue and bless His people Israel. God promised in Genesis 12:1-3 to bless the nations of the world through the nation of Israel. That ultimate blessing will issue in the forgiveness of sins and Messiah's glorious kingdom reign on earth.

God has chosen to reveal himself to man in a specific way. He has chosen to act in the affairs of men according to a set course of action, which will maximize the long term learning effect of the

creation and minimize the damage to that creation. For that reason He chose to confine the activities of the human creation to this planet and set up a system with which He could interact. His activities demonstrate His nature and purpose, and provide guidance to His people. He has not chosen to deal with all men at this time. He chose one people with which to make His covenant (Israel). This has caused other people of this world to curse Israel and, in turn, the curse is against them in the end. The activities of Jesus Christ in the Incarnation did not remove the covenant God made with Israel. Christ renewed that covenant (remember....the unconditional covenant) and made a new and higher system of interaction available to humans through the activities of the Holy Spirit.

References

- ¹ Webster's *New World Dictionary*, College Edition, page 339.
- ² Christian Churches of God, www.logon.org, *The Covenant of God*, page 1.
- ³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 & 2, page 42.
- ⁴ Cone, Christopher TH.D, *The Promises of God*, Exegetica Publishing & Biblical Resources, Arlington, Texas, page 24.
- ⁵ Much of this information was from Dr. Christopher Cones' book, *The Promises of God*, pgs. 24-27, not translated verbatim.

Bibliography

1. Chafer, Lewis Sperry, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 & 2, (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1976)
2. Christian Churches of God, www.logon.org, *The Covenant of God*.
3. Cone, Christopher TH.D, *The Promises of God*, (Arlington, Texas, Exegetica Publishing & Biblical Resources, 2005).
4. Webster's *New World Dictionary*, College Edition.