

# DOCTRINE OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

October, 2011

- I. Definition: The Abrahamic Covenant is a compilation of the promises of God to Abraham from his call in Ur of the Chaldees (at age 70 in 1876 BC; Gen. 12:1-3) to the occasion of the sacrifice of Isaac (50 years later in 1826 BC; Gen. 22)
  - A. A covenant is a contract between two parties.
  - B. It requires agreement between the party-of-the-first part, which is God, and party of the second part, which is in this instance, Abraham (ex. Mosaic Covenant; cf. Ex.19:8).
  - C. The Mosaic Covenant illustrates this as per God's part (Ex. 9:5-6) and, as per Israel's part (Ex. 9:7-8).
  - D. Once the contract is agreed upon, execution depends on the integrity of the parties.
  - E. The promises made to Abraham were accompanied by conditions, and therefore, God was making an offer (cf. Gen. 12:1-3).
  - F. The promises made to Abraham were based on what God knew to be true about him, namely that he would be obedient to his call, and all the other stipulations imposed on him during his lifetime (cf. Gen. 18:19 "For I have known him..."; , Gen.18:19 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because your have obeyed My voice.; Gen. 26:4-5 "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants these lands; and by/through your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."; Neh. 9:7-8 "Your are the LORD God, Who choose Abram, and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham; You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashite—to give to his descendants. Your have performed Your words, for You *are* righteous.").
  - G. The conditional aspect of the covenant with Abraham includes his willingness to separate from his homeland, his relatives and relocate to an unknown land, living there as a resident alien (Gen. 12:1 "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;"; cf. Heb. 11:8-9 "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise."); his willingness to comply with the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:10-14; 23 "Then Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all who were born in his house and all who were bought with money, every male among the men of Abraham's household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the very same day, as God had said to him."; 21:4 "The Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him."), and finally his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:16-18).
- II. The two pillars of the covenant with Abraham are land and descendants.

## A. Land/real estate.

1. The original promise of a future homeland for his descendants is found in Gen.12:1 "To the land which I will show you." and in v.2 "I will make you a great nation."
  - a. "Great nation" implies real estate.
  - b. It also implies descendants.
2. The identity of the land was first made known to Abraham when he first entered Canaan in 1871 BC (Gen.12:7 "To your descendants I will give this land (Canaan).")
3. Following his sojourn in Egypt it was defined to be all the land that Abraham could see "northward and southward and eastward and westward" (Gen.13:14).
4. Furthermore, it was promised to him (Ph 3 blessing) and his descendants in perpetuity (Gen. 13:15 "for all the land which you see, I will give it to you (Ph3) and your descendants forever." and, Gen. 17:8 "I will give to you and to your descendants after your, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.").
5. A specific articulation of the boundaries of the land of promise is found in connection with the formal ratification of the covenant in Gen.15 (v.18 "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt (Nile) as far as the great river, the river Euphrates...'").
6. It was on this same occasion when God told Abraham the time-frame when his descendants would be able to occupy the Promised Land (Gen. 15:13 "Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for a certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.'"; dated from the birth of Isaac in 1846 BC and fulfilled at the Exodus in 1446 BC and realized in 1406 BC at the Conquest).
  - a. Four hundred and thirty years elapsed from the call of Abraham to the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant (1876 BC to 1446 BC; cf. Gal. 3:17 "What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise."; cp. v.16).
  - b. To avoid confusion Ex. 12:40 should be translated: "And the sojourning of the sons of Israel, who lived in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years." (The start-up date is 1876 BC when Abraham began his life as a sojourner).
  - c. Acts 7:5 which reads: "But God spoke to this effect, that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND (note "his descendants" and note "aliens" starts with Isaac born in 1846 BC "in a foreign land"), AND THE THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS ("enslaved and mistreated" began with the Egyptian bondage occurring after the death of Joseph)."
  - d. Of the 430 years the Hebrew race sojourned in Canaan 220 years and in Egypt 210 years.

e. An examination of the lineage of Levi (e.g. ancestry of Moses) makes it impossible for the Jews to have been in Egypt 430 years (cf. Ex. 6:16-19).

7. Israel's captivities do not invalidate the land-grant of the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Joel 3:1-2 "For behold, in those days and at that time when I restore the fortunes/captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have also divided up My land."; also, Exek. 36:5; 38:16).

#### B. Innumerable Descendants.

1. The original hint of descendants/progeny is found in Gen.12:2 "And I will make you a great nation" (a great nation implies a lot of people).
2. Abraham was promised descendants as "dust" (Gen.13:16), beach "sand" (Gen. 22:17), and "stars" (Gen. 15:5; 22:17). Rom.9:4,5.
3. Adding to his legacy God promised that from him would arise "a multitude of nations" (Gen. 17:4, 6), "kings" (Gen. 17:6, 17).
4. God established His covenant with Abraham and his descendants as an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:7 "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.").

#### C. The Messianic Promise.

1. The promise of the coming Messiah is the 7<sup>th</sup> and final promise articulated in Gen.12:1-3: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
2. Paul asserted in Gal. 3:8 that this aspect of the covenant promises was a gospel presentation to Abraham: "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." (A quote from LXX of Gen. 12:3; cp. 18:18 "and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed." And, Gen. 22:18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...").
3. Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham says Paul in Gal. 3:16: "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ." (Cf. 3:19; Rom. 9:4-5).

#### D. Includes the Royal Family of the Church Age.

1. Abraham is the father of believers (Rom. 4:17 "For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it*

*may be* according to grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the faith (saving) of Abraham, who is the father of us all."; Gal. 3:7 "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are the sons of Abraham." 1Pet. 3:6 "just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.").

2. This is linked to the messianic promise associated with this covenant (Gal. 3:8-9 "The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, 'ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.").

### III. The Test of Abraham and Sarah's Faith in the Promise of Descendants.

- A. Sarah was barren throughout her childbearing years (Gen. 11:30 "Sarai was barren; she had no child.").
- B. Abraham and Sarah sponsored two individuals as substitute heirs in lieu of having no natural son.
  1. Abraham sponsored as heir Eliezer which suggestion God rejected (Gen. 15:2-4).
  2. 'Operation Hagar' was an attempt to produce an heir via surrogate motherhood (Gen. 16:1-4) producing Ishmael, whom God also rejected as heir (Gen. 17:18-19 "And Abraham said to God, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before You!' " "And God said, 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his descendants after him.'").
- C. Isaac, the miracle son, was born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age.
  1. At age 99 and 90 respectively, Abraham and Sarah were sexually dead (Heb. 11:11-12 "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and his as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.*"; Rom. 4:17-18).
  2. At age 100 and 91 Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah 30 years after Abraham's call and 25 years after entering the land (Gen. 17:17; 21:5).
  3. The line of promise extended through Isaac and none other (Gen. 17:19 "Then 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.'"; 17:21 "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year." Cf. 21:12 quoted in Heb. 11:18 "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED/DESIGNATED.").
- D. The supreme test of Abraham's faith was the divine directive to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:1-18).
  1. Abraham was 120 years of age (sic) and Isaac was 20 years of age.
  2. Abraham went into the test applying the promise of descendants through Isaac and the

doctrine of resurrection (Heb. 11:19 "He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he received him back as a parable/type.").

3. Abraham is a God the Father figure and Isaac was a Christ figure as per Jn. 3:16.
4. Abraham's reward for the near sacrifice of his son was high praise from Yahweh and the reiteration of the covenant with an divine oath (Gen. 22:12 "...for know I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." And verses 16-18.).
5. From that day forward the covenant was fully unconditional for all future generations (Gen. 26:3-5 "Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and in your Seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.").

#### IV. Installments of the Abrahamic Covenant

- A. The 1<sup>st</sup> installment was in the year 1876 BC when Abraham was 70 years of age (Gen. 12:1-3 "Yahweh 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 that bless you, and I will curse those who curse you. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.").
- B. The 2<sup>nd</sup> installment was five years later upon Abraham's arrival in Canaan promising him descendants and land (Gen. 12:7 "Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.").
- C. The 3<sup>rd</sup> installment took place after the sojourn in Egypt and Abraham's separation from Lot (Gen. 13:14-17 "Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, 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.").
- D. The 4<sup>th</sup> installment (1860 BC) came just after the defeat of the kings of the east and this installment was accompanied by a formal ceremony of ratification (Gen. 15:3-21).
  1. For the very first time Abraham is told that the heir would come from his own body (v. 4, which prompted Sarah in chap. 16 to propose a solution).
  2. Abraham exhibited faith in the promise of descendants (v. 6).
  3. He was given a prophesy dealing the future of his descendants in a land of bondage), and their return to the land of promise ((vv. 12-14, 16).

4. He was promised a long life ending his days in peace (v. 15).
5. An expanded definition of the land grant was given to him (vv. 18-21).
6. Still, there was no mention of Sarah's role in the covenant promises.

E. The 5<sup>th</sup> installment took place one year prior to the birth of Isaac (1847 BC; Gen. 17:1-22).

1. Abraham was 99 years of age and sexually dead; Sarah was 90 and sexually dead.
2. God promised him multiplication of descendants and many nations and kings (vv. 4, 5, 6).
3. He was granted a name change from Abram to Abraham (v. 5).
4. Both the descendants factor and the land grant factor were reiterated in perpetuity (vv. 7-8).
5. Circumcision was instituted as the sign of the covenant (vv. 11-15).
6. There came the 'Sarah-bombshell': she, in spite of her hopeless condition, would give birth in one year to the heir (vv. 15-16, 21).
7. Her name was also to be changed to Sarah and the name of the miracle child was Isaac (vv. 19, 21).

F. The 6th installment came in (1843 BC) connection with the banishment of Ishmael (Gen. 21:12-13), and features the doctrine of the primacy of Isaac as per the words "for in Isaac your descendants shall be designated" (preposition *beth* affixed to the proper noun Isaac. Quoted in the NT at Rom. 9:7 and Heb. 11:18).

G. The 7<sup>th</sup> installment (1826 BC) came in connection with the sacrifice of Isaac and was accompanied by a divine oath (Gen. 22:16-18).

V. The Abrahamic Covenant was reiterated to Isaac and Jacob.

A. Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5, 24).

B. Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15; 35:9-12).

Jack M. Ballinger