

# END-TIMES ISSUES

**#23** Abrahamic covenant – promises & responsibility.

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1

## The Abrahamic Covenant.

★ **This covenant teaches us:** We must be willing to *trust God* to keep his promises... and then to *base our lives on that trust*. ★

↪ **This covenant began** with an offer that had few details.

⦿ Abraham trusted God.

Then the LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country / kindred / father's household, and go to the land I will show you. I will [bless you in many ways]."

Genesis 12:1+ (BSB)

↪ **It ultimately resulted in something that affects every person**, because *Jesus' death and resurrection* are connected to it.

⦿ All who trust him are blessed.

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and foretold the gospel to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

Galatians 3:8 (BSB)

2

### Different issues in the Abrahamic covenant(s).

**TODAY**

The BASIS of the covenant.

- ↪ 1. LAND issues.
- ↪ 2. OFFSPRING, "seed."
- ↪ 3. A general focus on BLESSINGS (and cursings).
- ↪ 4. A special focus on WORLDWIDE BLESSINGS. (This includes what Jesus would do.)

Then the LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your kindred, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you;

and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 12:1-3 (BSB)

3

### The making of this covenant.

**God promised... Abraham trusted God and obeyed him.**

(Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *all* were characterized by trusting and obeying God (though they also had imperfections). Our focus here is on Abraham.)

↪ **1. God's initial call** to Abraham; he obeys. God promises him the land of Canaan *after he arrives there*. (Genesis 12:1-7)

THE N.T. TELLS US THAT HE HAD BOTH FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.

By **faith** Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, **obeyed** and went, **without knowing where he was going**.

Hebrews 11:8 (BSB)

**THE BOOK OF GENESIS** tells us only a few details from the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... the things we *need* to know.

- ❖ From these recorded events, we can see the link between *God's* promises and *their* willingness to trust God to keep his promises.

4

↪ **2. In Genesis 15**, Abraham appears to be frustrated about the time delay. God makes an unconditional covenant – promising him both offspring and land. Again, Abraham trusted God – and this trust was the basis for him being considered righteous.

THIS VERSE IS QUOTED 3X IN THE N.T., WHILE EXPLAINING THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION AND SALVATION.

Abram **believed** the LORD, and it was **credited to him as righteousness**.

Genesis 15:6 (BSB)

(Quoted in Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23.)

↪ **3. In Genesis 17**, God reaffirms his promise/covenant. This included a covenant to be the God of Abraham and his offspring in the land of Canaan. He also gives Abraham circumcision, as a "sign" or symbol of the covenant. *All three* of these matters are described as being "everlasting" in duration (see vs. 7-8, 13, 19).

5

↪ **4. In Genesis 21 & 22**, God promises that Abraham's offspring will be reckoned through Isaac. Then he tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham trusts God and promptly obeys. (At the last second, God prevents it from happening, and provides a substitute sacrifice.)

*This was a test of Abraham's faith – and his faith was proved to be genuine* (as described in James 2:21-24). Abraham knew that God would keep his promise. So if Isaac was sacrificed, there was only one way the promise could be fulfilled: *God would have to raise Isaac back to life*. Abraham's actions proved that he believed it would happen.

(THE N.T. POINTS THIS OUT.)

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

Hebrews 11:17-19 (NIV)

6

5. After Abraham dies, God reaffirms the Abrahamic covenant with Isaac (Abraham's son) and Jacob (his grandson). *Note that it is because of what Abraham did, that God did this.*

"... I will be with you and bless you. For I will give all these lands to you and your offspring, and I will confirm the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.

(TO ISAAC.)

I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed, **because Abraham listened to My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.**"

Genesis 26:3b-5 (BSB); also v. 24.

"I will give you and your descendants the land on which you now lie. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and east and north and south. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."

(TO JACOB.)

Genesis 28:13b-14 (BSB)

7

### Some additional comments about Abraham.

Abraham gives us an example to follow: He teaches us PATIENCE!

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through **faith and patience** inherit what has been promised.

... **after waiting patiently**, Abraham received what was promised.

Hebrews 6:12, 15 (NIV)

According to Jesus: Abraham anticipated Jesus' "day"!

"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

John 8:56 (NIV)

- This may refer to: ① the birth of Isaac (which set in motion the fulfillment of the promises that led to *worldwide* blessings through Christ). Or it may refer to: ② the time when Abraham offered Isaac on the altar (and God provided a ram as a substitute – which was a picture of what Jesus would one day accomplish on the cross).

8

### Trust and obedience characterized the lives of the patriarchs (Israel's ancestors).

It wasn't just when they were being promised something! (Lapses of faith sometimes occurred, but it was not the general pattern of their lives.)

By **faith** Abraham ... Sarah ... Isaac ... Jacob ... Joseph.

Found in Hebrews 11:8-22

#### EXAMPLES FROM THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM:

- God is given the praise for Abraham's victory over a confederation of kings – Genesis 14 (especially vs. 17-24).
- God calls Abraham a prophet (Genesis 20:7), in spite of what may have been a lapse of faith on Abraham's part (v. 11+).
- Abraham's trust was the reason for the requirements regarding who his son (Isaac) would be allowed to marry – Genesis 24:1-9.

9

#### EXAMPLES FROM THE LIVES OF THE OTHER PATRIARCHS:

- Isaac told his son (Jacob) to *not* marry a Canaanite – Genesis 28:1.
- Jacob makes a vow to God, on his journey to Haran – Genesis 28:20-22. He later returns to the place of his vow – Genesis 31:13; chapters 32+. (In this 20-year time period, his faith went from weak to strong. He recognized that he did not deserve the blessings God had given him – Genesis 32:9-10.)
- Joseph anticipated the fulfillment of God's promises (which would occur *centuries* after he had died), and asked that the people take his bones to Canaan, when they returned there – Genesis 50:25.

#### Why the marriage requirements?

- One of the aspects of the covenant was that the LORD God – the *true* God – would be *their* God... not only in *their* lives, but also in the lives of *their children*. This rarely happens when God's people *choose* to marry those who do NOT follow the God of the Bible. →

10

### GODLY OFFSPRING IS ONE OF THE REASONS WHY SCRIPTURE WARNS US AGAINST MARRYING AN UNSAVED PERSON.

Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, because **they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods**. Then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and He will swiftly destroy you.

Deuteronomy 7:3-4 (BSB)

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, **as long as he belongs to the Lord**.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (BSB)

- Believers and unbelievers may have common interests in surface issues. But when it comes to ultimate values, they have very little in common – 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.
- If you are in such a situation (even if it wasn't a deliberate act on your part), 1 Corinthians 7 gives you your options.

11

### God's faithfulness to this covenant.

#### To Israel belong the covenants.

This remains true, even though they don't deserve them – and even when they have *rejected* the God of those covenants.\*

[They] are Israelites. To them belong ... the covenants, ...

Romans 9:4a (NET)

- This would include God's covenants with Abraham, and the covenants that followed. (The previous covenant, with *Noah*, belongs to all people everywhere.)

THE THEME OF GENESIS: **God makes covenants**; Abraham (and the other patriarchs) *trust* God to keep his covenants.

THE THEME OF THE REST OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: **God remains faithful to his covenants**, even when the recipients of those covenants aren't.

\* [In all eras, some of the Jews *did* follow the true God... even when most didn't.]

12

**Theme: God "remembers" his covenant; he does not "forget" it. He is faithful.**

These words "remember" and "forget" are from *our* perspective, for God does not change. "Remembering" the covenant refers to situations in which God begins to actively do something related to it.

↳ **When it was time** for the Israelites to leave Egypt...

- He "remembered" his covenant – i.e., it was time for him to fulfil his promise to Abraham (see Genesis 15:13-16) – Exodus 2:24.

But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. ... God heard their groaning, and **he remembered his covenant promise** to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Exodus 2:23b, 24 (NLT)

- Later on their journey, Israel sinned greatly against God, and God threatened to destroy them. All Moses had to do was to "remind" God about his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:27 – and he did not destroy them.

13

↳ **When God introduced himself** to Moses ...

- He identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who would deliver them (by Moses) – Exodus 3:6, 15-16; Acts 7:32; etc.

Jesus says this statement is very significant. It *proves* that people who have died *still exist* (and are thus able to be resurrected). If they didn't exist, *God could not claim to be their God!*

"But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? **He is not the God of the dead but of the living.**"

Matthew 22:31-32 (NIV)

As we've already seen, Abraham had reached the conclusion that God could raise people from the dead. That conclusion enabled him to willingly obey God's command to sacrifice his son, *even though he also knew that God was going to fulfil his promises through that about-to-be-sacrificed son.*

14

↳ **When the people needed reminded**, God would remind the people of the requirements for experiencing the *blessings* of the covenant.

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps His covenant of loving devotion for a thousand generations of those who **love Him and keep His commandments.**

But those who hate Him He repays to their faces with destruction; He will not hesitate to repay to his face the one who hates Him.

Deuteronomy 7:9-10 (BSB)

↳ **When their sin brought judgment**, God said he would restore their blessings, *if* they were willing to repent and turn back to God.

But **when they confess** their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors... then **I will remember my covenant** ...

Leviticus 26:40a, 42a (CSB)

This passage, and several passages in Deuteronomy, are prophetic. They warn that Israel *will* abandon God and will be judged. But they will later return to God, and be willing to obey him. (Example: See Deuteronomy 4:30-31.)

15

↳ **In all these matters**, no matter what *Israel* does, *God will prove to be faithful to his covenant.*

... our God, the great and mighty and awesome God who **keeps His gracious covenant** ...

Nehemiah 9:32b (BSB)

Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance— who does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in loving devotion?

He will again have compassion on us; He will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast out all our sins into the depths of the sea.

You will show **faithfulness to Jacob** and **loving devotion to Abraham**, as You swore to our fathers from the days of old.

Micah 7:18-20 (BSB)

**HE IS STILL THAT WAY TODAY!**

God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is **faithful**.

1 Corinthians 1:9 (BSB)

16

**Theme: The people have an obligation to *not* forget God, and to choose to obey the covenant.**

When *people* "forget" the covenant, it's because they have *abandoned* it – and that determines the consequences they will experience.

↳ **Don't forget God!**

And when the LORD your God brings you into the land He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that He would give you— [many blessings listed here]—**be careful not to forget the LORD** who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Deuteronomy 6:10a, 12 (BSB)

- Forgetting God results in the loss of the blessings that come with serving God –mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:18-20, and many other passages.
- Yet (as we have already seen), though people may *forget* the covenant, God continues to *remember* it.

17

↳ **Each generation must choose** to follow the LORD. (We can't merely rely on the choices of our *ancestors*.)

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore **choose life**, so that you and your descendants may live, and that you may love the LORD your God, obey Him, and hold fast to Him. For **He is your life**, and He will prolong your life in the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (BSB); Joshua 24 is another of many examples.

- The focus in such passages is on the **group**: It influences what the *group* experiences, as well as (to some degree) what their *descendants* experience. (*Their own* choices will also be a factor.)
- Being a *group* of people, there may be many **fakes** – people who follow God *superficially*, and not from the heart. They may experience the blessings of the *group*, but such blessings will end at death.
- As **individuals**, we must decide if we will follow God wholeheartedly. This will have *eternal* significance, regardless of what the *group* does.

18

**Theme: The people *did* forget God and the covenant. But God didn't... and won't. That means there is hope!**

God warned them about the horrible consequences that would occur – destruction, exile, etc. But they *still* chose to abandon God. Even so, nothing they did could cause God to break his promises!

Even today, their sin *cannot* affect these promises. The promises were made to their *ancestors*, not to them! Here is one O.T. example:

Hazael king of Aram oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz. But the Lord was **gracious** to them and had **compassion** and showed **concern** for them **because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**. To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence.

2 Kings 13:22-23 (NIV)

- God's covenant with Israel is as certain as his covenant with the laws of nature – Jeremiah 33:19-26. (This passage mentions several of the covenants that God has made. *None* will be broken.)

19

**Theme: Blessings delayed, until Israel returns to God.**

No N.T. passage *cancel*s God's promises. But we learn that some of the promises are actually *greater* than what we could have imagined!

Jesus came to fulfill promises to **Abraham** – to deliver Israel from its enemies, so that they could serve God, etc.

"[God] has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful, **as He promised to our fathers**, to Abraham and his descendants forever."

Luke 1:54-55 (BSB)

"[God] has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke through His holy prophets, those of ages past, salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to show mercy to our fathers and **to remember His holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham**, to grant us deliverance from hostile hands, that we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our lives."

Luke 1:69-75 (BSB)

20

Israel rejected Jesus (at the present time). Yet after Jesus' resurrection, they still had an opportunity to change. Here is the offer:

"And [Israelites] are heirs of the prophets and of **the covenant God made with your fathers**. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant [Jesus], he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Acts 3:25-26 (NIV)

God has blessed the Gentiles with the opportunity to be saved, because of Israel's ongoing rejection of Christ. When, in the future, Israel returns to their God, it will mean even *greater blessings* for all!

But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means **riches for the Gentiles**, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! ... For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but **life from the dead**?

Romans 11:12, 15 (NIV)

21

## OUR MISSION?

- Learn from **Abraham**. Take to heart his examples of **trust** in God, and **patience** while waiting for God to do what he has promised he will do.

There is no legitimate reason for us to not trust God!

- Learn from God's **covenants with Abraham**. Through Christ, we have a **direct connection to them**.

Christ is the "seed" (offspring) through whom all peoples and nations would be blessed. We who are *united* with Christ in salvation share in the blessing that belongs to Abraham's offspring. *That's because Christ – the one we are united with – is Abraham's offspring.*

22

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23