

## The Abrahamic Covenant, Part I

Call to Worship: Psalm 32:1-2

Hymn # 709- *I Will Sing the Wondrous Story*

1<sup>st</sup> Scripture: Galatians 3/Romans 4

Hymn Insert - *Before the Throne of God Above*

2nd Scripture: Genesis 15

Hymn Insert - *Faith is the Victory*

Doxology (Supp)- *Thou Art Worthy*

### Introduction:

When I was last preaching in the evenings, we were looking at a broad overview of the *History of Redemption*, focusing primarily on key connecting points, such as God's covenants with various key men in history. We began by considering God's Covenant of Grace/Redemption, formulated before time (in and with Christ), and we have followed the opening and unfolding of this covenant in various ways, within time. We have considered the history of redemption in its seed form, found in Genesis 3, and we have traveled through the Noahic Covenants, into God's gracious promise to Abraham, in Genesis 11, where we left off in our travels thus far. For this evening, I figured, we could add another stepping stone to that series, by considering God's initial covenant with Abraham, given in Genesis 15.

This particular covenant is very precious because it precedes the second covenant (or at least the advancement of this covenant, found in Genesis 17), which God makes with Abraham, adding great weight to the fact that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works, since he was already justified here, *before* receiving the covenant sign of circumcision. The Apostle Paul's essential argument for a "faith based" salvation, as reflected in our father Abraham, given both in Romans and Galatians, hinges, in great part, on this text (along with the gracious promise of God, given in Genesis 12, which we considered last time). Whereas, last time, we saw nothing but "promise," and that on the part of God (emphasizing the gracious aspect of the free gift of salvation), here we find the proper reception of God's promises, given in the example of Abraham's "faith," which we are told, God accounted to him for righteousness. Both of these texts reaffirm, right from the outset, that salvation is *by grace through* faith alone. And all of this

moves and unfolds, right according to God's pre-time, covenant of redemption, which was made within the Godhead.

## **I. The Abrahamic Covenant**

Prior to this, Abram (Abraham) had gone to war against those kings who had taken his nephew Lot, along with the people of Sodom, captive. God had given him a great (and clearly a supernaturally supported) victory, and all of the people (and their goods) were rescued. Melchizedek, the mysterious and Christ-like, priest king of Salem, then came out and blessed Abraham, and Abraham paid him a tithe. And then, the king of Sodom, obviously very grateful for Abraham's help, came out to greet Abraham, and encouraged him to keep all of the recovered goods for himself, and only to restore the people to Sodom. But Abraham, manifesting a faith and a spirit unlike King Saul, refused to take so much as a thread or a sandal strap from the king, lest he would later claim that he had made Abraham rich. Abraham was consciously concerned for the glory of God, and wanted to ensure that everyone clearly knew, that it was God who provided for all of his needs, and not man. And so, he had vowed to God not to take anything that belonged to the king of Sodom, lest that would be used as a means of cloaking the fact that God was the one who raised up, blessed and provided for his servant. And so, Abraham continued to walk faithfully with his God.

And then, in our text, we are told that, "after these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision..." Abraham was here, hearing from the Lord once again. Sometimes, brethren, we can be under the assumption that people like Abraham and the prophets, just constantly heard from God, as if Abram could just speak, and God would audibly respond at any time. Not so. Indeed, Abraham spoke to God; he prayed, but he had to wait to hear from God, in His perfect timing. He had to remain faithful right where he was, clinging to prior instructions, until God should speak again (and this was the case with the prophets as well). In fact, more than likely, years could pass before receiving further revelation, at times. But we have the completed, written Word of God, brethren. Never think that we are somehow underprivileged because we hear no audible voice and receive no visions. We have the completed Canon...all that God has to say to us, is right here. They did not have this.

That said, God tells Abraham not to fear, because his reward would be very great (interpretive differences--see side column--why I might hold to other translations--Abraham's response--, although my soul loves the NKJV translation here). Abraham then responds, "Lord, how could my reward be so great. I am old and have no children." Remember, Abraham was over 75 years of age here. When he left Ur, back in chapter 12, he was 75. He's on his way out, in a certain respect, and his entire legacy will be left with a servant of his, who is not even of his own bloodline. What reward could possibly be so great, when this is the case? Indeed, the one thing Abraham probably longed for, more than all else, was a child, and God had not given him that. So, what else mattered? Can you imagine for a moment, brethren, the many, many years of grief that have struck Abraham and Sarah because of this? There had to have been a lot of pain; a lot of weeping and frustration in the past, which Abraham and Sarah had to overcome because of this, especially back then (remember, back then, offspring was everything, and women who could not conceive, were looked down upon, virtually as cursed). And Abraham knew that it was God, who had ultimately not given them a child. Needless to say, brethren, we don't want to diminish the agony of Abraham's response here. And furthermore, we don't want to diminish the significant substance of his faith, when he comes to believe God's promise, immediately following this.

God then responds by telling Abram that he will have an heir from his own body. And then he brings Abram outside, and gives him a pictorial description of the great blessing that will come upon him. He says, "Abram, look up at the stars, and count them, if you are able," Now, keeping in mind that Abram was not living on Long Island (and in the year 2012), you have to imagine that he could actually see the sky, filled with an innumerable amount of stars. And, of course, Abraham could not even begin to count them. And then God says, "So shall your descendents be." "Abraham, you are old, and presently have no offspring. But I am going to give you offspring, and your generations will be as these stars in number."

Now, if we stop there for a moment, what might we expect Abraham to say at this point? "Ummm, Lord, in case you haven't noticed, I am in my late seventies, Sarai is in her late sixties, and people just don't have children at such ages. It is not Scientifically possible. I mean, next you will tell me that a virgin will have a child, or something of that nature." But, of course, that is not what happened. In spite of the disappointments of the past, and in spite of the physical

impossibility of the present, we are told that, Abraham "believed in the Lord." Now, because this is the model "faith," toward which we all look for our example, it is important to note, that at the moment that Abraham "believed in the Lord," only God would be able to discern if that belief was sincere. We just cannot see the heart. What Abraham does from this point forward, will give us a sense of the sincerity of his faith. If it is a living faith, he will act upon it. But, at the moment of believing, only God sees the heart, and because God can see the heart, He tells us that this faith was genuine, and that God, "accounted it to [Abraham] for righteousness.

To be sure, Abraham had already been called by God, and he had already exhibited acts of faith before this (Gen 12; Gen 14), but here, as he specifically trusts in God's promise, especially related to the promise of his offspring, we are told that God, "accounted it to him as righteousness." And here, brethren, we have the model *par excellence* for justification; a justification before our holy God, based upon faith alone. Abraham believed that out of the dead womb, his seed would arise; and we believe that out of the stone tomb, the Christ had arisen. [Keep in mind, as well, approx. 25 more years pass, till this promise is fulfilled!]

Following this, God identifies Himself as the same God who had approached Abraham, back in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans, and He reassures Abram that He will give him the land that he is presently standing on, in fulfillment of the promise made back in Ur. And Abraham responds by saying, "Lord I have followed your directive," "How shall I know that I will inherit it." "Lord, I have done nothing to merit your favor. You have never been under any obligation to give me anything, let alone this land, how can I be sure that I will inherit it? After all, it is already occupied."

And then, in order to strengthen and secure Abraham's faith, God makes a covenant with him. He has Abraham gather several sacrificial animals, which Abram then kills, splits apart, and sets each half opposite the other half, with a space in the middle (except for the birds). And then, after shoing away a group of vultures, who sought to eat the sacrificial meat, Abraham falls into a deep sleep, which terrifies him. He sees the great affliction that is to come upon his descendents, as oppressed servants in Egypt, for four hundred years, and then he is told that following this, God will judge the Egyptians, release them from their bondage and bring them back to inherit this land. Abraham, however, would die at a good old age, prior to all of this.

And then, a smoking oven and a burning torch; visible representations of the glory and presence of God, passed through the middle of the split animal pieces, that Abraham had set down. And God made a covenant with Abraham, by this means, reassuring him of the promise, that God would give him and his descendents this land. In essence, God was saying, "Abraham, if I fail to fulfill all that I have promised to you, let me be as these dead animals---split apart and destroyed." God was swearing by Himself, for the sake of Abraham. [Note: Heb. 6:13; Gen. 22:16, 17].

## **II. Concluding Applications**

What can we then take from all of this, brethren?

1) Here, we find something critical, brethren, which the Apostle Paul utilized as an essential part of his "faith alone" argument in Romans 4 and in Galatians 3. Remember, Genesis was written, first, to the Israelites, who had just come out of Egypt. Genesis, is a part of the five Books of Moses; also known as, the Books of the Law. So, even as the Israelites received the Law of Moses at Mt. Sinai, they had this background in place, which ought to have shown them that obtaining the righteousness of God could never come by means of keeping the Law. You see, brethren, the faith element was always in place, even for Israel, which is why Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, uses all Old covenant, Old Testament examples, of those who lived and walked by faith.

And so, the Apostle Paul, after laying out his impeccable case for the condemnation of all men under the Law, further confirms his "faith alone" conviction, by pointing back to Abraham, as an example of the faith. For, Abraham, before receiving the command to receive the sign of circumcision; before the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai, by Moses, was justified by faith alone, in the Lord. Abram believed "in the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And Paul moves on to quote David, from Psalm 32:1-2, affirming that the one who is truly blessed, is not the one who works, or the one who keeps the law, but the one, "whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin" (or credit their sin to their account). And so, while the Old Covenant, ministrated through Moses, was grounded in the Law, it was never meant to supersede or abolish the fact that a

person can only be justified in the sight of God; a person can only be forgiven for his sins in the sight of God, by exercising genuine faith in God, and His promise. The Mosaic Law, as a whole (including the Moral Law, understanding that the Moral Law served multiple purposes) was meant to serve a tutorial purpose for the nation of Israel, until the Christ should come. Notice how Paul wonderfully links both covenants together, in this respect (Read Romans 4:9-25/Galatians 3:19-29).

2) While the promise made to Abraham, concerning the receiving of a son, and generations as numerous as the stars, through this son, certainly spoke of his physical descendants, embedded in that same promise was the greater reality, that Abraham would receive another Son, the Christ, by whom, a spiritual generation, as numerous as the stars, would come; a people, received *not* on the basis of mere physical descent from Abraham, but rather, on the basis of sharing a like faith with Abraham. And in that sense, brethren, the Apostle Paul tells us, that we, who have come to embrace Christ by faith, are the fulfillment of that promise. We are the true children of Abraham, not according to the covenant made in the circumcision of the flesh, but in the circumcision of the heart. We are the true Israel, brethren. And so, in the broader scope of redemption; in the hidden recesses of God's inter-trinitarian divine counsel, before time, that glorious plan which was developed and preordained by God, has unfolded unto this greatest of all ends, that we should be called "children of the living God!" And, it is in Abraham, that we find a reference for our faith; for a justifying faith, that grants us full access to God by Jesus Christ! The Moral Law, portrays the righteous and holy character of God before us, convicting us, exposing our sins and pointing us in the direction of a "faith based salvation." The entire sacrificial system; every aspect of the ceremonial law, foreshadows the very object of that faith; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And then, as we live by faith, the keeping of the Law becomes a pleasure based initiative; *not* a tool for crushing us with our every wrong, but a visible guide, enabling us to see how we can respond to God's love for us, by living for His glory, in the keeping of His Law. All of this comes together, in God's glorious plan of redemption!

3) Some might ask, "Why did God not just remove the foreigners from the land immediately, and give Abraham the land, right then and there?" "Why the 400+ year delay?" Read Genesis 15:16.

Brethren, behold the patience and longsuffering of God, here. God does not immediately destroy, but rather, He is patient and long suffering toward us. Friends, if you are outside of Christ this evening, then recognize this. You still live (and that may change, even suddenly), not because God does not care about your sin, or because He doesn't see your sin, but rather, because God is patient and long suffering toward you. Don't take that for granted any longer though. Your time is, indeed, running out, and when it does, that patience will be translated into a deeper and heavier weight of felt wrath...**The Gospel!!!**

AMEN!!!

**Benediction:** Jude 1:24-25