

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT – Session Three



The Abrahamic Covenant is an *unconditional covenant*, or an agreement between two or more parties that involves no stipulations of any kind for the fulfillment of the agreement. The covenant that God makes with Abraham is found in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1-3, NRSV

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 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 shall be blessed.”

The unconditional nature of the covenant is found in Genesis 15.

Genesis 15:1-6, *NRSV*

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

“Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” But the word of the Lord came to him,

“This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven

and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to

him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the Lord; and

the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.



When a covenant was *conditional* or dependent upon both parties keeping commitments, then both parties would pass between the pieces of animals being sacrificed. In Genesis 15, God alone moves between the halves of the animals.

Abraham was in a deep sleep. God's solitary action indicates that the covenant is principally God's promise. God bound God's self to the covenant.

Later, God gave Abraham the rite of circumcision as the specific sign of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Genesis 17:9–14, NRSV

God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must

be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

All males in Abraham’s line were to be circumcised and thus carry with them a lifelong mark in their flesh that they were part of God’s physical blessing in the world. Any descendant of Abraham who refused circumcision was declaring himself to be outside of God’s covenant; this will explain in next week’s lesson why God was angry with Moses when Moses failed to circumcise his son.

God determined to call out a special people for God’s self, and through that special people, God would bless the whole world.

Based on this promise, God later changed Abram’s name from Abram (“high father”) to Abraham (“father of a multitude”).

God’s promises to Abraham’s descendants will be fulfilled literally.

The Abrahamic Covenant included the promise of land (Genesis 12:1). It was a specific land, an actual property, with dimensions specified in Genesis 15:18–21. In Genesis 13:15, God gave Abraham all the land that he could see, and the gift is declared to be “forever.” God was not going to renege on God’s promise. The territory given as part of the Abrahamic Covenant is expanded in Deuteronomy 30:1–10, often called the Palestinian Covenant.



Centuries after Abraham died, the children of Israel took possession of the land under Joshua's leadership (Joshua 21:43). At no point in history, though, has Israel controlled all of the land God had specified. There remains, therefore, a final fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant that will see Israel occupying their God-given homeland to the fullest extent. The fulfillment will be more than a matter of geography; it will also be a time of holiness and restoration (see Ezekiel 20:40–44 and 36:1—37:28).

The Abrahamic Covenant also promised many descendants (Genesis 12:2). God promised that the number of Abraham's children would rival that of "the dust of the earth" (Genesis 15:16). Nations and kings would proceed from him (Genesis 17:6). It is significant that the promise was given to an aged, childless couple. But Abraham "did not waver through unbelief" (Romans 4:20), and his wife Sarah "considered him faithful who had made the promise" (Hebrews 11:11). Abraham was justified

by his faith (Genesis 15:6), and he and his wife welcomed Isaac, the son of promise, into their home when they were 100 and 90 years old, respectively (Genesis 21:5).

Quick discussion:

Why do you think that God used an older, barren couple to birth the nations?

How does this impact your understanding and attitudes about how God might use us?

God reiterates the Abrahamic Covenant to Isaac and to his son Jacob, whose name God changes to Israel. The great nation is eventually established in the land where Abraham had dwelled.

The Abrahamic Covenant also included a promise of blessing and redemption (Genesis 12:3). All the earth would be blessed through Abraham. This promise finds its fulfillment in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34; cf. Luke 22:20), which was ratified by Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham and Redeemer who will one day “restore everything” (Acts 3:21).

Five times in Genesis 12, as God is giving the Abrahamic Covenant, He says, “I will.” Clearly, God takes the onus of keeping the covenant upon God’s self. The covenant is unconditional. One day, Israel will repent, be forgiven, and be restored to God’s favor (Zechariah 12:10–14; Romans 11:25–27). One day, the nation of Israel will possess the entire territory promised to them. One day, the Messiah will return to set up His throne, and through His righteous rule the whole world will be blessed with an abundance of peace, pleasure, and prosperity.

It is important to understand that three themes have developed a repetitive pattern in the covenants that we've covered so far:

- Obedience
- Faithfulness
- Righteousness

What, exactly, are they?

- **Obedience:** A response given in light of a command. It doesn't really matter whether the command is obeyed or not; the fact is that the response, or lack of a response, is a matter of obedience.
- **Faithfulness:** To know what it is, we look at the first 5 letters of the word – Faith. Faithfulness and Faith are interchangeable.

Faithfulness is a response given in light of a promise. Think about when you marry – you make promises – for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. Faithfulness is more than just you won't be having sex with other people; rather, you believe those promises are true that were made to you and so

you live your life in the light of that promise. When someone's spouse makes a vow that they are going to love them with their whole heart, cherish them and that they will live life with them accordingly, the person believes them.

- **Righteousness:** Also look at the first 5 letters of the word – Right.

Righteousness is doing what is right. We live in a time when we love talking gray areas, moral ambiguity, and other hot-button topics. But here's the deal. When you wake up in the morning, turn the light on and look at yourself in the mirror, you understand that despite gray areas and moral ambiguity, 99% of the time, you know what it is to do what is right. You know how to treat other rightly. THAT is righteousness. Living right. Doing the right thing.

- Obedience, Faithfulness, and Righteousness are all 3 part of religion. Which one is most important?
- For many people, obedience is at the top... even if it doesn't make sense... JUST DO WHAT YOU ARE TOLD.

(Think about the woman who claimed that God told her to cut her 2 year old's arms off... Or, Mohammad Attah, who said the 9/11 attacks were because God told them to do it...)

- A lawyer said to Jesus, in all of religion, what is the most important aspect of all? Did Jesus say, “Shut up and do what you’re told!”
 - No, of course not. He said to love God with everything you are; and, love your neighbor as yourself. RIGHTEOUSNESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS (It’s the whole of the law)
- If you hear God telling you to do harm to another human being – you are not hearing God!
- Will you obey or love? This is the center of the law. Abraham never got it and it’s the reason all the families of the earth are still not blessed.
- How does this inform social justice in our world today?