

# THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

## THE UNSHAKABLE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH

One can learn much about G-d's character by studying His various names. One of these names is "the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". So early in His Word we realize that G-d is a G-d of people or a G-d of relationships. This is one of the most re-assuring aspects of our Creator.

Another way to look at the G-d of relationships is achieved by studying the different agreements that He made with mankind in general and with the Jewish people in particular. These agreements, celebrating relationship and commitment, are also known as covenants. Understanding G-d's covenants is critical to understanding G-d's plan for mankind and for Israel.

Eight such covenants have been drawn and ratified throughout G-d's Word. They are the Edenic, the Adamic, the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic, the Land and the New Covenants.

The most important and foundational of these is the Abrahamic covenant, as it governs not only G-d's unique relationship with Israel but also his relationship with the Nations as a direct result.

A proper understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant is key to understanding not only G-d's purpose for Israel and the Nations, but also G-d's way of dealing with mankind in general as this covenant is also the basis for the development of other covenants. In many ways, G-d's covenants can be seen as legal agreements between the Creator and mankind and/or Israel.

One key passage of Scripture is also the first time we read about the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12:1-3:

*<sup>1</sup> 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;*

*<sup>2</sup> 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;*

*<sup>3</sup> And 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."*

Additional references to the Abrahamic Covenant can be found in Genesis 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21 and 22:15-18.

**The first thing worth mentioning about the Abrahamic Covenant is the fact that G-d ratified it with Abraham alone, and as a matter of fact, even**

**though Abraham was the recipient of the Covenant and the representative of the Jewish nation, he did not actively participate in the signing of it.**

History tells us that in the days of Abraham and before, when two parties joined efforts into the signing of a covenant, animals would be used as a witness to them and their adherence to that covenant. The two parties would gather a number of specific animals, sacrifice them and arrange their carcasses on the ground in some fashion, creating a path through which both parties would pass together as they swore to uphold their end of the contract lest they receive the fate of these animals for any breach of that covenant for which they would be responsible.

In the case of Abraham, he prepared the animals and made a path, but when the moment came for G-d to ratify the covenant, he put Abraham into a deep sleep; and only G-d's glory went through the animals. Most of the fifteenth chapter of the book of Genesis speaks of this event:

*<sup>1</sup> After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."*

*<sup>5</sup> And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."*

*<sup>7</sup> And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it."*

*<sup>8</sup> And he said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I shall possess it?"*

*<sup>9</sup> So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon."*

*<sup>10</sup> Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds.*

*<sup>12</sup> Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.*

*<sup>17</sup> And it came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.*

*<sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.*

**The second important aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is the fact that since G-d was the only one to walk between the animal halves when He ratified the covenant with Abraham, and since G-d never changes His mind, the Abrahamic Covenant is eternal. It only depends on G-d fulfilling His part and not Abraham.**

From the introductory passage in Gen. 12:1-3 and subsequent passages listed above, we can deduce several clauses that are vital to the understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant.

- Abraham was to be the father of a great nation, and that is of course, the nation of Israel (Gen. 12:2; 15:5).
- He was promised a Land for his nation; specifically, the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1, 7; 15:18-21; 17:8).
- Abraham himself was to be greatly blessed (Gen. 12:2b).
- Abraham was to be a blessing to others (Gen. 12:2d).
- Those who bless Israel will be blessed (Gen. 12:3a).
- The one who curses Israel will be cursed (Gen.12:3b).
- In Abraham all will be blessed (Gen. 12:3c).
- Other nations in addition to Israel would come from Abraham (Gen. 17:3-4, 6)
- Circumcision was to be the sign of the covenant (Gen. 17:9 14).

These clauses always fall into one of three categories as to whom they relate to: Abraham, Israel as a whole or the Gentiles.

**Abraham** is the father of a great nation (Israel). He was to possess ALL the Land promised to him by G-d. He would be greatly blessed and would be a blessing to others. To this day Abraham's name is greatly recognized by all three major world religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

**Israel** as a nation was promised greatness and a myriad of descendants as well as the whole Promised Land as well. It is important to understand that the mere fact that some of the promises were made to BOTH Abraham and his descendants proves that some of these blessings have yet to be fulfilled, which points to fulfillment in the future age of the Messianic Kingdom.

**The Gentiles** were promised a blessing for blessing the Jewish people as well as a curse for cursing the Jewish people. We must note that the Abrahamic Covenant contains both physical and spiritual promises for the Jewish people; but as it pertains to the Gentiles, only the spiritual promises apply. The physical promises such as the Land or circumcision apply only to the Jewish people.

Each covenant made by G-d calls us to consider any requirements or conditions attached to it.

The Mosaic Covenant, for instance, was an agreement made between G-d and the Jewish people through Moses; and it required obedience to the 613 commandments contained in it in order for Israel to be blessed (Exodus 15:26). In other words, the Mosaic Covenant was conditional to Israel's obedience to the Law. Another way to look at it is that when G-d makes a conditional covenant with a party, in essence He is saying: "If you will....I will!" When the Covenant was unconditional, G-d simply stated: "I will!"

**Abraham was told by G-d that he and the Jewish people would become a Covenant people and reap the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant simply because G-d said so, no strings attached. Thus the Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional.**

The three main aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant: The Land, the Descendants or Seed, and the Blessing are further developed, each leading into an additional, unique covenant. The Land is further expanded into the Land Covenant (Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20), the Seed is developed into the Davidic Covenant (II Samuel 7:11b-16; I Chronicles 17:10b-14), and the Blessing comes through the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Furthermore, the unconditional and eternal Abrahamic Covenant has been confirmed through one and only one of the eight sons of Abraham: the son of the promise, that is Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5, 24), as well as through Isaac's son Jacob in Genesis 28:13-15. Finally Abrahamic Covenant was also confirmed through Jacob's twelve sons who represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 49).

Finally, we must look at the Abrahamic Covenant and its fulfillment. The main item that has yet to be fulfilled is the Land aspect of the Covenant. There has not been in past history, nor up to the present day, a time when Israel has lived in the Land according to G-d's expanded boundaries as delineated in Genesis 15:18-21.

The boundaries described here are to be fulfilled during the Millennial Kingdom (Luke 1:68-73; Hebrews 6:13-20), a promise that believers can grab hold of, since the Abrahamic Covenant is eternal and unconditional.

The Abrahamic Covenant was sealed between Abraham and the G-d of Israel as early as Genesis 15. Some of its clauses went into effect immediately, some a bit later, and some are yet to be fulfilled.

Regardless of G-d's timetable for the fulfillment of the entire Abrahamic Covenant, it remains foundational to G-d's dealing with Israel and the nations, as G-d chose to make it eternal and unconditional.