

“The Covenants of Promise” – Class 2

The Abrahamic Covenant

[Read Psalms 105:8-11 & I Chronicles 16:8-18]

In the similar passages just read, the last one referred to in 1st Chronicles is a prayer of David to celebrate the occasion of bringing the Ark of the Covenant up to Zion. Along with the resounding praise and thanksgiving that is offered to God – David exclaims something that should catch our attention and make us take notice. The Spirit through David states in verse 15: “*Be ye mindful **always** of His covenant.*” How often? - ALWAYS! What covenant are we to be mindful of? The record further explains – the covenant with Abraham, the oath unto Isaac, a law of Jacob, and to Israel an everlasting covenant. This clear description calls our minds back to the detail record given in Genesis of God calling Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees to lead him to a land “which I will show thee”. It was there that God promised unto Abram (later changing his name to Abraham) great and precious promises; promises that only through a belief in them can we be found acceptable before God – promises that are a matter of life and death.

Our discussion now turns to the promises made to Abraham – the prophetic and doctrinal outcome of God’s covenant as well as the striking exhortational affect these promises are to have on how we live our lives. This will only be a brief overview of a very extensive and far reaching subject.

Why are we to be “mindful”?

Before we continue any further we ask the question: *Why are we exhorted to be always mindful of the covenant made to Abraham?* Our answer: In the Edenic promise we were introduced to the promise of a Savior as an antidote to the problem of sin and death but in the covenant that God made with Abraham is the foundation and outline of God’s plan of salvation for this earth. It contains all that God has to offer and all that is revealed afterwards in the scriptures is added information about the same promise. Adam brought sin, condemnation, alienation, and death upon the human race by his transgression in the Garden: “*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, **IN WHOM** all have sinned.*” But in the covenant with Abraham we see God’s plan laid out for salvation from this terrible plight and eternal reward. Abraham and his seed were promised the land for an everlasting possession – here is the promise of everlasting life. They could not possess the land forever unless they lived forever. Let us turn to **Romans 1:16**... here we read that; “The Gospel is the power of God unto” ...WHAT?... “the power of God unto salvation.” The so-called religious world makes out this Gospel to be a New Testament phenomenon but yet we read in Galatians 3:8 that God preached the Gospel unto Abraham. **Question:** What is the Gospel? *The things concerning the **Kingdom of God** and the **name of Jesus Christ**.* So considering that the Gospel was preached or proclaimed to Abraham it stands to reason that we find the “good news” of “*the Kingdom*” and “*the Name*” **in the Abrahamic Covenant**. In the Edenic promise there is no information given regarding the Kingdom and only allusion given to the Name. These are matters that we must understand, matters that we must be dogmatic about; and for the reason that

it has a direct impact on salvation – this is why we are exhorted to be always mindful of God’s covenant with Abraham. It is the Gospel, it is the power of God unto salvation.

What is a “Covenant”?

Now that we have made reference many times to the word “covenant” it is important that we clearly define its meaning. The word “covenant” is from the Hebrew word “berith” and its most prevalent meaning is that of a legal agreement, promise or contract between two parties. Webster’s Dictionary defines the English word as “*a promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action.*”

Bro. John Thomas refers to the Abraham Covenant as a “Divine Legal Instrument”. Unfortunately (as we briefly mentioned in the previous class) there is a growing trend within our community to shun anything referred to as “legal”, but for those enlightened fully by God’s truth it will be realized that God works according to laws that He himself has established, therefore God uses “legal” means in fulfillment of His will. We cannot escape the all pervading and legal aspects of God’s workings with man. Therefore, the phrase used by Brother Thomas is most fitting in relation to our subject.

In defining the word “covenant”, bro. Ted Farrar in his 1997 booklet concerning the Abrahamic Covenant stated: “Whenever two parties conclude an agreement in a formal manner, it is done by means of a legal covenant which is binding upon the parties involved. In the case of a covenant between God and Man, because God cannot default, it is also called a promise, for this reason the Abrahamic Covenant is called by both terms and can properly be called, “A Divine Legal Instrument”.

There is also a fuller meaning to the word “berith” that we need to be aware of. “Berith” is derived from the primitive Hebrew root word of *berah*, which is a synonym of the word *berar* – words that carry the meaning to purify or cleanse. It implies a purification or a purifier. This is something that we will touch on in more detail in just a little bit but we see that in God’s covenants with man that sin and sinfulness exist on the part of man. God’s covenants are intended to reconcile men to God and make man fit to inherit God’s eternal promises and to fully glorify His Name. Purification is necessary for this to be accomplished. Again, we will discuss this a little later when we consider how the Promises made to Abraham are confirmed.

Terms of the Covenant – Promises Made

We have already made many references to the promises but now it is necessary for us to review what exactly the promises are that God made to Abraham. Using terminology based upon our modern day contracts we refer to these as the Terms of the Covenant. Time does not allow for us to read all of the scriptures associated with the promises but we would like to review them by chapter.

GENESIS 12

- God will make of Abram a great nation. (vs.2)
- God will bless Abram and make Abram's name great and Abraham will be a blessing.
- God promised "that I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." (v.3)
- God promises that "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed".
- "Unto thy seed I will give this land".

GENESIS 13

Please read chapter **13:14-15**, "*And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him*" **PLEASE RECITE THE REST WITH ME** "*Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.*"

- God promises the land to both Abram and his seed, all the land of Canaan forever.
- God would multiply Abram's seed as the dust of the earth.

GENESIS 15

- In verse 6 we are told that Abram believed the promises that God had made and that God counted or imputed "it to him for righteousness". Not a "blind faith" which is not faith at all but an intelligent comprehension and acceptance of God's word.
- In the same chapter in verse 18 we see the size of the land grant described as being "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates". [stop and show slide] And though a specific land grant is revealed as being the center of which all blessings will flow, this promise finds even wider scope in later revelation. In Romans 4:13 Abraham is referred to as receiving the promise to be "heir of the world (kosmos)". In Psalms 2:8 we read "*I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*" We are told that the "*meek shall inherit the earth*". So though the scriptures give specific dimensions as to the Abrahamic land grant, even giving more detail to the tribal inheritance in Ezekiel 48, we know the full scope of this promise is to comprise the entire earth.

GENESIS 17 [now called Abraham, 5th letter of the Hebrew alphabet added]

In verse 7 the term "*everlasting covenant*" is used to describe the covenant that God has made between Abraham and his seed. There was another "covenant" that was not everlasting that God made with the Children of Israel at Mount Horeb that dealt with temporal blessings – a covenant that fulfilled its mission and was taken away. The covenant made with Abraham is "everlasting". Keep this phrase in mind when we discuss Christ as he relates to these promises and the hope of resurrection. Remember that Christ was raised from the dead "by the blood of the everlasting covenant".

- Abraham is promised here that he will be a father of many nations.
- Kings will come out of Abraham.
- The LORD covenants to be a God unto Abraham and to Abraham's seed forever.
- God promises to allow the seed of Abraham to join in on the "everlasting covenant".

GENESIS 22

After Abraham was tested in offering up Isaac as a sacrifice God makes an oath with Abraham . We read in verse 17: *“That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.”* Does it state here “their enemies” implying a multitude or does it state “his enemies” referring to an individual? We know that the focus of Abraham’s seed here is singular speaking of certain individual descended from Abraham. Continuing on we read *“And in they seed”* this certain individual who would descend from Abraham *“shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”*

Here we have:

- The promise to multiply Abraham as the “stars of heaven and as the sand that is upon the sea shore”.
- Give possession to the singular seed of the “Gate of His enemies”. Or in other words this individual would defeat all enemies and rule over them.
- That all nations might find a blessing through this singular seed. How do we know we are speaking of a singular seed and not a multitude? Turn to **Galations 3:16** – *“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, ‘And to seeds’ as of many; but as of one, ‘And to thy seed,’ which is Christ.”*

The Prophetic and Doctrinal Outcome of these Promises

These promises that we have mentioned are plainly stated and clearly indicate the promise of a future and eternal inheritance of the land, a multitudinous seed coming out of Abraham, a singular seed who would rule over all enemies and in whom all nations of the earth would be blessed. But on the surface it would seem that we have a problem. What happened to Abraham? He died. Was he promised a place among the angels in heaven? No, he was promised the land, “northward, southward, eastward, and westward” – all the land that he could see and then some **for ever**. **Hebrews 11:13** tells us what? “These all died in faith, not having received the promises”. Stephen tells us in Acts 7:5 concerning Abraham, *“And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession.”* Some try to point to the Jewish inheritance of the land after coming out of Egypt as a fulfillment of the promises but this a precursor, a token of a much grander and permanent fulfillment. Remember, it was to Abraham and to his seed that the promises were made for ever. How do we know that God will fulfill his word? **Hebrews 6:13** – *“For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by not greater, He sware by Himself”.* And skipping down to **verse 18**, *“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation...”* - What are the two things? – THE PROMISE and THE OATH – the promise that God has made and the absolute pledge that He will fulfill what he has promised.

Though not directly stated in these promises but clearly implied and elaborated upon elsewhere in the scriptures, there are explicit prophetic and doctrinal teachings that come out of these promises made and that form the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ:

- First of all the hope of life eternal, and not in the heavens but on earth.
- Abraham was told that he would die, so there would be the need and the hope extended to Abraham of a resurrection to receive the promises. This lesson was powerfully taught to Abraham in Genesis 15 when a deep sleep and “horror of great darkness fell over him” – which is a symbol of death, a death that he would have to awaken from. Also in Genesis 22 we read of the testing of Abraham’s faith by being commanded to offer up his only son Isaac. Abraham demonstrated his faith and understanding of the hope of resurrection here by recognizing that God’s promises could not be hampered by death. We read in **Hebrews 11:19** regarding what was going through Abraham’s mind at the time, “Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure”. Being a figure or a representation, Abraham was able to see in this action God giving His only begotten Son, and the resurrection of that Son to life through sacrifice – “who was brought again from the dead”... “through the blood of the everlasting covenant”. So the hope of resurrection provided through the blood of the covenant.
- In the promises we see the unmistakable lesson that Faith is a requirement in order for man to be found acceptable before God.
- Abraham was taught that through covenant and **only** through covenant making would such benefits be realized.
- It is clearly implied that through covenant there is the justification and forgiveness of sins for it is impossible that sinful man can inherit these eternal promises. Sin, both constitutionally and personal must be atoned for before a relationship with God can be entered in to.
- We see through the animal offerings made by Abraham of the necessity of the shedding of blood and the need of the shedding of blood of a greater sacrifice, that being the promised seed (Christ) through whom salvation would be realized and the fulfillment of the promises confirmed. Not only salvation for Abraham but also to a multitude of others – referred to as the “many nations”- who associate themselves with the promised seed.
- We are taught that inheritance of the Abrahamic Covenant is extended to all who are found to be “in” the promised seed or “in Christ” through faith. More on that in a moment.

Confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant

We have made reference to the promised seed as being Christ, but what role does he play in this matter of the Abrahamic Covenant? This promised, individual seed is not only mentioned in reference to the promises made to Abraham, but as Abraham himself would have been aware of had been promised shortly after the fall of man in the Garden as the Seed who would bruise (or destroy) the head of the serpent - In other words the destruction of the Sin Flesh nature that hinders man’s participation in eternal life.

Abraham asked the question in **Genesis 15:8** (still named Abram at this time) regarding the inheritance of the land – “*Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*” The fact is that when these promises were made Abraham was a stranger and sojourner among those stronger and mightier than he; he also understood his lifespan was limited. Abraham was

looking for evidence or a token of “things not seen”. And after the manner of covenant making during those times, Abraham understood that something was needed to confirm, authorize or “ratify” the covenant that God had made with him. A covenant is not legally functional until it is ratified. What was the answer given to Abraham? He was told to take a heifer, a she goat, and a ram (all three years of age – the number of resurrection) and divide them in the midst (the birds were not to be divided). Now sacrificing animals in such a way as this was a common practice of those times in dealing with covenants between men and is even referred to by the prophet Jeremiah (34:18). But, the sacrificing of these animals in and of themselves would have no eternal value – but what it represented in the case of God’s covenant with Abraham had the utmost significance. Bro. Williams in the World’s Redemption states:

“In the very nature of the case, then, a covenant provided by God for fallen man demands a sacrifice which will admit of reconciliation and atonement between God who is pure and man who is sinful, and this must take place before the covenants of promise could be realized.” (p.80)

Let us turn over to **Hebrews 9:16-18**. The Authorized version of this passage is a poor translation of what the Spirit word is trying to express, but the Emphatic Diaglott is much clearer. *“For where a Covenant exists, the Death of that which has ratified it is necessary to be produced; because a covenant is firm over dead victims, since it is never valid when that which ratifies it is alive. Hence not even the first has been instituted without blood.”* A covenant cannot be in force, it cannot become fully operative until the death of the covenant sacrifice. Who is the covenant sacrifice represented by those animals that Abraham divided? It is Christ, the real covenant sacrifice, the perfectly righteous seed to whom the promise given to Abraham was also made.

If you will remember we made reference to the fact that the word covenant/ berith means to purify or cleanse and that it implies purification or a purifier. Not only does it represent the covenant (or agreement) but also the sacrifice which confirms the covenant by opening up a way of justification/purification for sin stricken man. Moses declared to the people in Exodus 24:8 – *“Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you”*. Who other did this blood represent but the blood of the victim slain as a covenant sacrifice - Christ. In **Isaiah 49:8** we read concerning Christ, *“Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.”* Christ was spoken of as being given as “a covenant” or in other words as the covenant sacrifice. In **Zechariah 9:11** we are taught of the **only** revealed means in which men will be brought out of the grave – *“By the blood of the covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water”*. Whose blood releases from the pit/death ? The blood of the covenant victim; again we are speaking of Christ.

It will be noticed back in Genesis 15 that Abraham walked between the animal parts that had been divided. Bro. Williams explains here that, *“In this way, in covenants between God and men, man, who is a sinner and under justice without mercy, deserves death, may be said to have passed into the death of the victim, or to have died sacrificially or representatively, admitting of atonement.”* It can be said that in order to join in covenant relationship with God, through Faith Abraham had to avail himself of the blood of Christ, the covenant victim. He had to pass out of

Adam into Christ, from one relationship as a constituted sinner **into** the justifying effects of the covenant victim. And it must be understood (and we will keep emphasizing the point) that Christ also, as a representative of the fallen race was himself unclean, under condemnation - in need of atonement. In order for him to inherit the promises he also had to be justified. How was this? - Through his own blood. As the covenant victim he was a beneficiary of his own sacrifice. Hebrews 13:20 – “*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.*” Whose blood? – his own. What covenant? – that made with Abraham and in with further detail promised to David.

In **Romans 15:8** we read, “*Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers*”. In **Galatians 3:17** we read that “*the covenant*”...“*was confirmed before of God in Christ*”. If only the masses of professing Christianity could grasp the connection that the sacrifice of Christ has to the great and precious promises made to Abraham and its bearing on God’s plan for this earth. If only many calling themselves Christadelphians understood the absolutely critical role that covenant making through Faith and the shedding of blood has in connection with the Hope of Resurrection and the promise of life everlasting.

The Seed of Abraham

Up to this point we have discussed the fact that both Abraham and Christ (the promised individual seed) were heirs of the Covenant that God had made. But do these promises include anyone else? To Abraham it was promised, “*I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand upon the sea shore*”, and “*thee and thy seed shall inherit the land*”.

Speaking from a natural sense, after the flesh we exclusively understand the Jews, the nation of Israel as the seed of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, **it does not** include the other sons of Abraham. But we must also understand that there is a spiritual aspect as well that is of the utmost importance for us to understand. We must realize that the promises involve a multitudinous seed of Abraham according to the spirit.

Now regarding the nation of Israel’s (after the flesh) relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant, Bro. Ted Farrar had this to say. “Does this mean, then, that the whole nation of Israel were to become heirs of the Abrahamic covenant? By no means. The reason for this is that another Divine Principle of Exclusiveness was operative, namely, *‘They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.’*” (Rom. 9:8) He continues: “We need to digress here and discuss the significance of the word counted. A synonym for counted is reckoned, treated as, or deemed. What Paul is saying is that, out of the multitudinous Nation of Israel, (the Jews) only those who were “children of the promise” that is, those who had faith in the covenant, were deemed, reckoned and counted as the true seed of Abraham.” (p.22)

So just because one is born a natural descendant of Abraham (through Isaac and Jacob) does not automatically entitle them to be an heir as is found under the terms of the covenant. Paul states in **Romans 9:6-7**, “*For they are not all Israel which are of Israel*”. There is a natural and

spiritual application to the term Israel. Jesus referred to Nathaniel, “*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile*”. And the apostle Paul refers to the saints in Galatia as “*The Israel of God*.” (Gal. 6:16). Paul is explaining that just because one is born an Israelite after the flesh does not automatically make them an Israelite after the spirit. The qualifying element that makes one a part of the “children” or “seed” of promise is the principle of Faith. This is clearly spelled out in **Galatians 3:6,7** – “*Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham*.” And in **verse 22** of the same chapter we read, “*that the promise by **faith** of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe*.”

Bro. Farrar continues along these lines by concluding: “The only natural Israelites who will inherit the promises are those who become heirs of the Abrahamic covenant through faith therein and who “walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham”. They constitute the called, the chosen and the faithful; “Israelites indeed”; the “Israel of God” – the true spiritual seed of Abraham”.

Examples of who are being referred to here would obviously include individuals such as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, the prophets, the Apostles and a whole multitude of Faithful Jews whose names have gone unrecorded in the scriptures.

Now, before we are mistakenly accused of overlooking those of natural Israel, the natural descendants of Abraham and excluding them from God’s plan and purpose let it be understood that they are still considered to be God’s people and will have a role in the fulfillment of God’s promises, and we will deal with that aspect in a moment. But before that we wish to deal with the matter of the Gentiles.

What about the Gentiles? Regarding the Gentiles Paul in **Ephesians 2:12** states, “*that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*.” Aliens, and “strangers” from the covenants of promise – not a very good situation to be in, especially when we understand that it is only through the covenants of promise that mankind has any hope. Unless we become the seed of Abraham we are without hope. What answer is given then? Verse 13 – “*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes (or **ONCE**) were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ*.” By coming in contact with the blood of Christ, the covenant sacrifice, through the principle of Faith we too have the hope of these promises. Paul continues his explanation of how the Gentiles are allowed access to the promises through the redemptive work of Christ and then states in verse 19, “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God*.” So **along with the Faithful Israelites** mentioned a moment ago the Gentiles are also allowed access to the promises as part of the spiritual seed. They (we) are spoken of in the scriptures as being “adopted”, “grafted” into the One Hope as beautifully explained in Romans 9 . The Gentiles **DO NOT** replace Israel as inheritors of salvation as is the dogma of those who hold to something known as “replacement theology”. But by God’s mercy **and only** by his mercy are we allowed to be joint partakers/ joint-inheritors of the promises made to Abraham through the redemptive work of Christ. **Ephesians 3:6** – “*That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel*.” How do we avail ourselves redemption through Christ – the covenant sacrifice? **Galatians 3:27-29**. “*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ*

*have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. **And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.***" How could it be stated any clearer than this?

Now, Israel according to the flesh, nationally speaking, has always and will continue to play a central role in God's plan. They are the natural seed of Abraham, and scripture after scripture explains in great detail their restoration to the Land of Promise, their future repentance, future prosperity, their exalted position over the Gentile nations, and their restoration to favor with God. As Paul clearly states in Romans 11: 26 concerning natural Israel – *"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:" "For this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."* When we view Israel we are to sorrow in their misfortunes and persecutions and to joy in their success and triumphs. They speak to us as evidence of our Faith and act as witness to the surety of God's plan for this earth.

Speaking of the future Commonwealth bro. Williams in *The World's Redemption* eloquently states the relationship that exists between the natural and spiritual Israel, remembering that spiritual Israel is made up of the Faithful – Jew & Gentile:

*"the commonwealth will be enjoyed by the Israel of God, **first** according to the spirit, and **secondly** the nation of Israel restored to the land of their fathers – the former, which constitute the one great body politic, of which Christ is the head, will be the rulers – those who will have overcome, prevailed and become princes with God, kings of whom Christ is King; "King of Kings, and Lord of lords," will be the rulers, while the twelve tribes of Israel restored to the land promised to Abraham **will be the subjects** to be "planted in a land of their own and never moved; neither shall the children of wickedness any more afflict them as before time."* (p.76)

Closing thoughts

Before moving on to our next class we have to ask the question – was the Gospel (the "good news concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ) preached unto Abraham? - Absolutely. When asked what the Gospel is those of the mainstream Christianity will usually say that it means that "Christ died for us" – this meaning that God showed his love by coming down as a man to die on the cross for our sins. This is far as they go with it, and based upon their erroneous views is far as they can go. What they do not understand is that there is an inheritance that is involved. Acts 26:18 – *"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan (adversary) unto God, that they may **receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance** among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me."* Is the inheritance heaven? No, it is that which is promised to Abraham. So in the Abrahamic promise we see The Gospel – the promises of God and a means of reconciliation from the law of sin and death (the Kingdom and the Name). Abraham understood and hoped for it; Christ understood it, hoped in it, and by shedding his blood confirmed it; and through faith and our connection to Christ's shed blood through baptism we also hope for it.