

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT—PART 2

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Introduction

Thus far in our study of the Abrahamic Covenant we have considered the following matters: the major issues related to the Abrahamic Covenant, and the parties, historical establishment, and promises of that covenant. This present article will examine other matters related to it.

The Partial Historic Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant

Parts of the Abrahamic Covenant have been fulfilled already. *Personally*, God did bless Abraham with great wealth and other blessings (Genesis 24:1, 35). God made him a blessing to others (for example, Abraham rescued Lot from captivity, Genesis 14). God has made Abraham's name great (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have respected his name for centuries). God has given him many physical descendants and made him the father of a multitude of nations (the nation Israel has descended from him through Isaac and Jacob; some Arab nations have descended from him through Ishmael).

Nationally, God did make a great nation (Israel) of Abraham's physical descendants. He did give the promised land to Israel after its exodus from Egypt (Deuteronomy 31:7-8; 32:45-52; Joshua 1:1-5, 10-11). In addition, Israel has never perished as a people.

Universally, God has made great blessing available to all families of the earth through Abraham's physical line of descent. For example, Jesus Christ, who as a Jew was a physical descendant of Abraham, provided salvation for all mankind through His substitutionary death on the cross, burial, and bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:1-2). Thus, Jesus could declare that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). In addition, the Scriptures were produced primarily by Jewish prophets and apostles (Romans 3:1-2). Further, God has blessed those people and nations who have blessed Israel, but He has judged those who have abused Israel.

It should be noted that those parts of the Abrahamic Covenant which have been fulfilled thus far have been fulfilled *literally* (in accordance with the historical-grammatical method of interpreting the Bible, not in accordance with the allegorical or spiritualizing method). This would seem to imply that God intends every promise of that covenant to be fulfilled in that manner.

In addition, it should be noted that some parts of the Abrahamic Covenant have not been fulfilled totally. Since God promised to give the land of Canaan for an *everlasting* possession to Abraham's physical descendants (Genesis 17:8) and to give the Abrahamic Covenant for an *everlasting* covenant to those same descendants (Genesis 17:7, 19), it cannot rightly be said that all the promises have been fulfilled totally until at least the end of world history.

The Controversy Concerning the Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant

In many respects the most crucial of the three major issues related to the Abrahamic Covenant is as follows: is that covenant conditional or unconditional in nature? This issue is most crucial because it determines the outcome of the other two major issues which were noted earlier.

If the Abrahamic Covenant is *unconditional* in nature (not dependent upon Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their physical descendants, the people of Israel, meeting conditions for the fulfillment of its promises), then every promise of that covenant must be fulfilled—including the promises that Israel would be given *forever* the land described in Genesis 15:18, and that the Abrahamic Covenant would be an *everlasting* covenant for Israel. This would mean that Israel would last forever as a people and that God has a future for that nation and its land. It would also mean that the biblical prophecies concerning the future of Israel and its land are to be interpreted literally and that the Dispensational-Premillennial view of those prophecies is correct.

By contrast, if the Abrahamic Covenant is *conditional* (dependent upon Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the people of Israel meeting conditions for the fulfillment of its promises), then not every promise of that covenant has to be fulfilled. Failure by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the people of Israel to meet the conditions could nullify the fulfillment of the covenant's promises. In light of such failure, Israel would not have to be given the land of Canaan *forever*, the Abrahamic Covenant would not have to be an *everlasting* covenant for Israel, the biblical prophecies concerning the future of Israel and its land could be interpreted allegorically or spiritualized, and the Dispensational-Premillennial view of those prophecies would be wrong.

Theologians disagree concerning whether the Abrahamic Covenant is conditional or unconditional. Dispensational theologians contend that the covenant is unconditional. Covenant theologians disagree with each other on this issue. Many Covenant theologians say that the Abrahamic Covenant is conditional, but other Covenant theologians say that it is unconditional, but that the national promises to Israel must be interpreted allegorically, not literally.

Those who believe that the Abrahamic Covenant is conditional point to certain biblical statements as their proof. For example, Genesis 17:1-2 declares that, when Abraham was 99 years old, God said to him, “walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.” In Genesis 22:16-18 God said to Abraham, “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD; for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; 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 seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice.”

In Genesis 26:3-5 God said to Isaac, “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

On the surface, these statements appear to indicate that the Abrahamic Covenant is conditional in nature. Before that conclusion is drawn, however, several significant things should be noted. The next article will begin to consider those things.

For a comparison of Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology obtain the following book: Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is A Difference!* (The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry. Telephone: 800-257-7843. Mailing address: P.O. Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08099).

