

Lesson 28

7.3 The Abrahamic Covenant

- In the last lesson we studied Abram's call and God's promise to him. We saw that this promise centered on three words: **land**, **descendants** and **blessings**. We showed how, after Abram fully complied with the conditions set by God, leaving the land, his family and his father's house, God was then able to complete the revelation of the promise to Abram. After Abram separated from Lot, God clearly showed him the **land** that he would receive, Abram and his **descendants**, forever.
- The revelation concerning descendants was missing, and we talk about Abram's concern about having a son and how God confirmed that the heir / successor would come from his womb. And finally, God showed the stars in the sky and comparing them to Abram's descendants. The Bible then records: '***and Abram believed in the Lord***'. Despite all the adversity of the circumstances, Abram believed in the Lord's promise that there would be a descendant.

⇒ Genesis 15:6

- '***And the Lord accounted it to him for righteousness***'. This is the first time that **righteousness** appears in the Bible; Abram believed in the Lord and was justified.

⇒ **Romans 4:1~5;** '*His faith is accounted for righteousness.*'

⇒ **James 2:14~26;** However, faith without works is dead; faith is demonstrated and perfected by works, through how we act on a daily basis.

If we believe in God and don't walk according to his principles, our faith is useless. We'll see that Abram was justified by faith, he believed as far back as Ur of Chaldea, but he will demonstrate by works, by his actions, who he really believed in.

⇒ Genesis 15:7~8

- Apparently, from Abram's question (V.8), we could assume that there was disbelief in his heart. If there had been disbelief, God would not have answered Abram as he does in the Bible. We will see in two other passages what happens when there is disbelief and when there is not:

⇒ Luke 1:5~25

- When the angel announced to Zechariah that Elizabeth his wife would give birth to John the Baptist, Zechariah asked the angel (V.18): '*How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.*' What happened to Zechariah? He became mute because of his disbelief! Zechariah prayed to God for his wife to have a child, and when God answered his prayer, he questioned it and said it wasn't possible. The proof of this is that the same thing happened to Mary, and she didn't become mute.

⇒ Luke 1:26~38

- Didn't Mary ask the angel the same question (V.34)? When the angel said to Mary, '*you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son*', she said, '*How can this be, since I do not know a man?*'. Mary wasn't praying to have a child, Mary didn't even know what would happen, so the question was legitimate. But Zechariah's question was not legitimate, it showed disbelief.

- So, when we see God answering Abram, there was no unbelief in his question. Rather, there was a need for clarification so that his faith would be increased, more facts had to be presented, because that's how faith increases. Remember at the beginning of the course when we talked about needing something to exercise faith? God was going to give Abram more elements to increase his faith.
- Up to this point, Abram had been walking on God's promise, a simple promise. But now, in response to Abram's request, God will change the promise into a covenant. Perhaps for us today a covenant means nothing, but in those days, it wasn't like that, there were covenants between people. In the OT we have several passages of people making covenants, making alliances.

⇒ **Genesis 21:22~34;** Abram himself made covenants.

- There were different types of covenants, alliances or agreement; they are different words for the same thing. What is a covenant, alliance or agreement? It's when two people agree and commit themselves on a matter. Marriage is a covenant, indissoluble and unbreakable. There were also temporary covenants. In the East, for example, there was the sandal covenant where two people agreed on something and exchanged their sandals, but they could destroy them, and the covenant was broken. There was a salt pact, which was a little longer; in that hot region, no one traveled without a '*little packet*' of salt tied around their waist, because salt conserved water in the body. When two people chose the salt pact, they mixed a little of their salt packets together and as long as the salt lasted, the pact was in force.
- But there was the so-called '*blood (alliance) covenant*', which was eternal. Since the blood covenant was made according to the terms of the time, albeit by men, no one could revoke it. In this blood covenant, the two people who entered into the covenant would kill and cut an animal in half and place the two halves next to each other, with a space between them. The people would hold hands and pass between the halves of the animal, declaring the terms of the covenant. There the covenant was established and ratified. What did that mean? It meant that the covenant could not be broken, because those halves of the animal were substitutes for each person in the covenant and the parties were dead. How could dead people break a covenant? There was no way, that covenant was for life, there was no going back. If the covenant was broken, the blood of the one who broke it would be shed just like the blood of that animal was shed. The blood covenant had these two meanings.

⇒ **Genesis 15:9~21**

- When Abram heard what we read, he must have been very scared, because he knew about this kind of covenant. But when God came and said, '*take the animals*', he thought: three, plus a turtledove and a young pigeon? It's very beautiful what God has done. God is Triune, that's why there were three animals. They were sacrificial animals, a heifer, a goat and a lamb, plus two animals from heaven which were also sacrificial animals, but which would not be killed. I think it was to indicate that the three people came from heaven. God then said: '*Take the three animals, kill them and cut them in half*'. Abram did so because he knew the covenant. So, he prepared to give his hand to God and pass between the halves of the animals, and naturally he thought: '*God is going to make a covenant with me in which I will know clearly that I will have a descendant, and I will have my share in that covenant*'.

- **V.10:** Abram carries out the command.
- **V.11:** birds of prey! There was someone in the realm of the spirit who didn't want this covenant to be made, who was tempting Abram, but he was there believing and watching.
- **V.12~16:** Abram spent the whole day preparing and driving away those birds, and just when he thought he was going to pass through the halves of the animals, a deep sleep comes over him and he can't stand it. It's interesting that a deep sleep came over him, but Abram heard and saw everything that happened. Why did Abram fall asleep? Because God was making a covenant with this man, an unconditional covenant, a covenant in which there were two parties: one would receive the covenant, and the other would commit themselves unconditionally. It's as if God were saying: '*whatever happens, I God will do it; I enter into a covenant with you and promise this, this and this*'. In a conditional covenant, it would be like this: '*if you do your part, I'll do mine; if you don't do yours, I'm released from mine*'. It's wonderful because God left Abram in a deep sleep, Abram didn't pass through the middle of those halves. We'll see next who did.
- **V.17:** Suddenly, in the midst of that darkness, a smoking oven and, don't think it's the same thing, and a burning torch, passed through those halves. Jesus Christ (a burning torch) passed with God (a smoking oven) between the pieces; **Jesus Christ is the Covenant**. Remember when God instituted the blood sacrifice, and we talked about the substitute? Jesus is our substitute, Jesus' sacrifice is a vicarious sacrifice, he died in our place. Hallelujah, it's done and there's no turning back! God is going ahead with His plan to rescue man.
- **V.18:** on that same day, God declares the covenant: '*To your descendants I have given this land*'; again, descendants and land.
- **V.19~21:** when God asks us for something, we think we're missing out and we get scared. When God said to Abram: '*Get out of your land and go to the land that I will show you*', perhaps Abram thought I'm going to lose everything! But Abram decided to believe; I'm going to follow what God said, I'm going to lose everything for God, I'm going to leave everything here. God is now giving land back to Abram and adding much more. If we look at today's map, '*from the river of Egypt (which is not the Nile) to the great river Euphrates*', it encompasses: Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, as well as Israel. Ur of Chaldea was in Iraq and was much smaller. This whole boundary will one day be Israel's, because God is faithful, he always fulfills everything he says. God promised this land to Israel forever.
- If we understand well that God only acts on earth through man, because he has decreed it so, we will understand Abram's story better. When God called Abram and made a covenant with him, he now had a man on earth, he now had a free channel to act on earth. The Bible calls Abram '*God's friend*'.
 - ⇒ **Isaiah 41:8**
 - ⇒ **James 2:23**

Noah was a friend of God, David, Moses were also friends of God, but only Abraham was called '*friend of God*', because friend is a covenant term. God is man's friend!

- From Abram onwards, something happened on earth. We will see God acting with greater freedom, after all, he has made a covenant. This is very important; everything depended on it. We can't consider this great event as '*just one more covenant*'. Abraham is our father; he is the father of faith; in him all the families and nations of the earth would be blessed.
- Because of this covenant we studied, God could now act freely here on earth. Remember the '*Eternal Covenant*' we studied at the beginning, where the Tri-Unity made a covenant with each other before the foundation of the world? The Son offered himself. The Tri-Unity knew that the human race was going to sin, and the Son offered himself; the blood of Jesus known before the foundation of the world but manifested at the end of time. Yes, Jesus offered himself to take man's place, that was the '*Eternal Covenant*'. What was the price? His life, His blood, because after sin the sentence was death for man. Now, with God's covenant with Abram, the '*Eternal Covenant*', which was almost prevented from being manifested, is beginning to '*to land*' here on earth, Hallelujah!

⇒ Genesis 16

- In chapter 16 we see the birth of Ishmael, Abram's son with Hagar, through the interference of sinful flesh wanting to '*help*' God fulfill His Word. Abram didn't know how to wait, and that's what we do too. Ishmael's birth was the flesh wanting to help God. Time began to pass, pass, learn the lesson, and the answer was delayed. You ask God for something, you know that God will give it, because that request is in accordance with His Word, and the answer doesn't come. So, you start to come up with a plan (don't you?), you think: '*If I don't give a little help, it won't happen*'! Then you go over the entire Word of the Lord and complain that it didn't work out. There is God's time for everything. A woman has '*a great idea*', her husband agrees and then everything goes wrong! That's what Sarai did, and Abram agreed; it was the same with Eve. Beware, women can be very deceitful. Sarai thought it wouldn't be possible and, as it was natural for the man to have the continuity of the family, she offered her slave Hagar to Abram, who was also Egyptian. This all happened before Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the son of promise.

⇒ Galatians 4:21~31

- Sarah and Hagar; the work of the Spirit and the work of the flesh. Ishmael's birth was the fruit of the work of the flesh, it was planned by the flesh, an effort of the flesh, totally natural. Abram was normal, he had children after Isaac, and Hagar was also normal. Sarah wasn't, she was sterile, and God waited until she was 90 years old (*Abraham was 100*) for Isaac to be born, which means that, as well as being sterile, Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. It was the work of the Spirit; Isaac's birth was totally supernatural.

God changes Abram's name to Abraham

⇒ Genesis 17:1~8

- God gradually revealed himself to Abraham, and it's the same with each of us today. God gradually reveals and deepens Himself to one of His children. With Abraham came first a promise and then a covenant. Now God changes Abram's name and then will interpose himself with a judgment. God changed Abram's name because in a blood covenant, everything that belonged to one person also belonged to the other, be it debts or possessions; even names were changed.

What was God doing? The word Abram means high father! Now think, a man who had no son, calling himself father, and yet elevated? Then God comes along and changes the name to Abraham by putting his own name inside Abram. Abram is now called Abraham; this ‘ **ham** ‘ comes from the name Jehovah in Hebrew. God introduces His name into Abram, and in Hebrew, Abraham means ‘ *father of multitudes or father of many nations* ‘.

⇒ **Genesis 17:15~17**

- The same thing happened to Sarai, God put the ‘ **h** ‘ in her name, and she was called Sarah. God's name was introduced, and it became ‘ *princess or mother of nations* ‘. And God said that Sarah would give birth in a year, and she was already 90 years old!

God gives the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision

- We can imagine Abraham's joy when Ishmael was born; he was a son but almost like a grandson or great-grandson. When Isaac was born, Ishmael was 14 years old; Abraham must have loved Ishmael deeply.

⇒ **Genesis 17:18~22**

- **V.18:** some people interpret this verse to mean that Abraham was asking God to make Ishmael heir to the promise; I believe that Abraham was simply concerned about Ishmael. God even overlooks the issue.
- **V.19:** it gives the impression that Abraham interrupted what God was saying, ‘... *may Ishmael live* ‘, ‘ *and Ishmael Lord?* ‘ God didn't even trust him, he continued what he was saying. God often does this to us, he's showing us something, saying something, and we keep thinking about something else.
- **V.20:** God then finished the subject and returned to what Abraham had asked; from Ishmael descend the Arabs, there are twelve nations. There is a promise for the Arabs too.
- **V.21:** God continues to go deeper in his revelation to Abraham and confirms the covenant in Isaac, the ‘ *son of promise* ‘. Then God gives the sign of the covenant, circumcision, the sign of the ‘ *Abrahamic covenant* ‘.
- Circumcision was the sign that the father believed that God's promise would pass on to his son, from generation to generation; ⇒ **Genesis 17:10~14**. God stipulated circumcision on the 8th day of life, and every male born would be circumcised. It was the sign that the father believed that God's promise was a continuous covenant, from generation to generation, so it was done in the organ of procreation. The 8th day is the day on which ‘ *vitamin k* ‘, the coagulation vitamin, has its peak in man, it has the highest peak in the human organism.

⇒ **Genesis 17:23~27;** circumcision is instituted.

- There is a deeper symbol in circumcision, it is the symbol of the extirpation of what is bad in man, this is what God also wanted to show when he instituted circumcision. It was a symbol of faith, its value was not in the circumcision itself, but in the faith with which it was done. When a father performed circumcision on his son, believing that the promise was passing on to that son, and believing that God would fulfill His Word, then circumcision was valid before God. Circumcision in the flesh alone is worthless.

⇒ **Jeremiah 4:4**

- God is saying that the external mark doesn't matter to him; the external mark to extirpate what is bad has to be on the inside of man, in his heart. True circumcision is that of the heart.

⇒ **Deuteronomy 10:16**

⇒ **Deuteronomy 30:6**

⇒ **Romans 2:17~29**

Remember what we've already said:

God uses visible, material things to explain invisible, spiritual things.