

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series (Proph6_The Abrahamic Covenant)

Introduction – The Necessity for the Covenant with Abraham

The necessity for God's covenant with Abraham is deeply intertwined with God's purpose for human history expressed through the doctrine of the Angelic Conflict.¹ We have studied this doctrine on many occasions, so there is no need to redevelop it here. However, suffice it to say that after the Fall of man in the Garden, Lucifer gained dominion over this earth from man for the primary purpose of destroying the evidence (i.e. human history) that God intended to use to rebut Lucifer's objection to God's sentence of the Lake of Fire and eternal separation from Him.

The final execution of the sentence that was pronounced at the time of Lucifer's fall in eternity past is to occur after God has accomplished His purpose in human history, i.e. provide evidence through a lower creature that God's essence attributes function in a unified and harmonious manner. Lucifer's challenge (and the challenge of millions of other creatures) that God is not a God of love and is unfair is totally without basis. In eternity future when there is only positive volition in God's kingdom, human history will serve as evidence to God's redeemed creatures that God is fair.

By the point in human history that Abram arrived on the scene in Genesis 12, Satan had executed his desire to destroy the evidence (i.e. human history) and challenge God's authority with some degree of success. We do not have a blow-by-blow description of the events of those early years of human history nor do we know exactly how many years had passed; however, we can surmise the trend by examining some of the known facts from Scripture and extra-Biblical sources. Satan was very active in the exercise of his dominion over the earth and its inhabitants. For example:

- Genesis 3 – The Fall of Man and the Promise (3:15) – Satan wrests dominion of the earth from man by enticing man to disobey God. The bait that Satan uses is an appeal to become like God (Ge 3:1-5). God demonstrates His love for the inferior creature man by giving a prophecy of Satan's doom and of the Redeemer to be born (Gen 3:14-15 cf. Isa 53:4-6, 10-12; Jn 1:29).
- Genesis 4 – Corruption and increasing evil
 - 1st Murder – Cain murders Abel – a Satanically inspired effort to prevent the Redeemer from coming (Ge 4:1-8 cf. Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:10-12)
 - Proliferation of evil – Lamech's flagrant disregard of God's pattern of one man and one woman (Ge 4:19 cf. 2:24; Matt 19:4-6) plus his arrogant boasting in

¹ God's purpose for the creation of man is vitally related to events that had occurred in eternity past as referenced in such passages as Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12b-19. As we have previously studied, these events led to the creation of an inferior creature (man) so that the inferior creature might provide evidence in Lucifer's appeal trial to his sentence of eternal separation from God. I have found various components of the doctrine of the angelic conflict in the writings of several men. I have arrived at my position on the subject as a result of filtering the views of the following men: Renald E. Showers, ***What On Earth Is God Doing? Satan's Conflict With God*** (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1973); Donald Grey Barnhouse, ***The Invisible War*** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965); Lewis S. Chafer, ***Satan, His Motives and Methods*** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1990); Stanley A. Ellisen, ***Biography of a Great Planet*** (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1975). In addition, see Lewis S. Chafer, ***Systematic Theology*** (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), Volume II, 78-81, 85, 100-101, 103-104, 108, 110, 120-121.

regard to the murder of men (Ge 4:23) reflected a evil pattern of behavior that was becoming more prevalent in society.

- Genesis 6 – The earth becomes filled with violence and corruption (Ge 6:11, 13) and man’s thinking was only evil continually (Ge 6:5). The human race had even become contaminated through copulation between fallen angelic beings and the “daughters of men” (Ge 6:1-2; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). This was followed by the judgment of the Flood recorded in Genesis 6-9.
- Genesis 10 & 11 – In contrast to God’s command to “fill the earth,” Satan inspired man to remain congregated in one area in an obvious attempt to spread apostasy faster. Satan provided a symbol of unity for the human race and a common project which could unite their efforts at honoring themselves (i.e. the Tower of Babel). The Satanic inspiration for this effort is obvious as they desired to not be scattered (Ge 11:4). This was Satan’s first effort at a one world religion and as is characteristic of all false religions, man is deified (Ge 3:5, 22 cf. 11:4). The leader of this effort was apparently Nimrod whose name is related to the Hebrew word for “rebel.” He was a tyrannical ruler, a mighty hunter, and the founder of several powerful cities which eventually became centers of power for Israel’s enemies. These cities were concentrated in the area of Mesopotamia or the plain of Shinar, where the attempt at unification and one-world religion was concentrated (Ge 10:8-12 cf. 11:2, 5-8).² God countered Satan’s efforts to increase apostasy through a one-world religious system opposed to God. God simply confused their ability to communicate by introducing multiple languages.

The repetitive cycle of degeneracy in the human race after each judgment of God (e.g. the curse at the Fall of man, the Flood, the Tower of Babel) exhibited the effectiveness of Satan at blinding the inferior creature, man, to the truth. God needed to establish a new race and nation of people who would be His Own and who would preserve His revelation to man. God found a man who would heed His call. That man was Abram who lived in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans (Ge 11:31). The Redeemer, first promised in Genesis 3:15, would come through Abram’s line of descent (Matt 1:1; Lu 3:23-24).

God’s Covenant With Abraham³

² It is possible that the Sumerians, who lived in the Mesopotamian region between 5000 and 4000 B.C. and who were the predecessors of the Old Babylonians consisting of the Elamites and Amorites, were the almost direct descendants of the peoples who were involved in the Tower of Babel incident in Genesis 11:1-9. The Mesopotamian civilization may owe its character to the Sumerians. The Sumerians lived in a loose confederation of city-states and they developed a code of law that was essentially the 1st version of the Code of Hammurabi. They believed in a number of gods and goddesses, each capable of both good and evil. Their religion included a creation epic featuring the god Marduk as well as a flood epic. [See Edward McNall Burns, *Western Civilizations – Their History and Their Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 50-55]. The Sumerians are one illustration of how quickly ancient civilizations after the Flood and the Tower of Babel degenerated into polytheism and spiritual depravity characterized by Paul in Romans 1:19-23. There was no written Canon of Scripture at this point – only oral tradition. Oral tradition was easily distorted by Satan into false histories and misrepresentations of God’s revealed will to man which had been communicated to man directly (e.g. Ge 3:15) and through angelic communication (e.g. Heb 2:2). The polytheistic religion of the Sumerians with its counterfeit creation and flood epics is one example of Satan’s distortion of oral tradition. God needed to set aside a race of people who would be the repository and preservers of His revelation to man and who would serve an evangelistic purpose to other nations and peoples.

³ Sources consulted include J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1990), 72-81; Mal Couch, *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), 27-32.

Importance of the Covenant – From the standpoint of interpreting the Old Testament, the Abrahamic covenant is the single most important event. If you take the Abrahamic Covenant out of Scripture, the interpretive key to not only the Old Testament, but also the Gospels and the prophetic passages of the New Testament (especially the book of Revelation) is removed. The following points develop this idea further:

- ❑ It governs God's entire program for Israel and the nations (e.g. Israel would be a theocracy, set apart for the purpose of drawing all peoples to Himself).
- ❑ It establishes God's strategy for accomplishing His objectives in history (e.g. the use of a chosen people and nation through whom man's dominion over the earth would be re-established and Satan's dominion over the earth would be usurped).
- ❑ It is foundational to understanding God's redemptive purpose and activity in human history (e.g. the use of a chosen people through whom the Redeemer first promised in Genesis 3:15 would come).
- ❑ All subsequent revelation is the outworking of this covenant (e.g. the other unilateral covenants, the bilateral Mosaic covenant, the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, the Person and work of our Savior/Messiah/Redeemer, the temporary postponement of its fulfillment through the intercalation of the Church, etc.).
- ❑ It is the key to understanding and interpreting biblical eschatology.

Immediate Background for the Covenant – As seen above, by the time Abram arrived on the scene of human history, wickedness had spread over the earth. Satan had distorted the oral tradition of Truth that was being preserved by a few into false religions that were counterfeits to the Truth. Even Abram's father was an idolator (Josh 24:2). Rather than destroying the wicked as before (i.e. the Flood), God chose Abram out of a land of idolatry through whom He would establish a theocracy and accomplish His redemptive purpose. (God's omniscience foresaw the positive volition which would manifest itself in Abram's life as God progressively and iteratively revealed His sovereign will and purpose. God's omniscient foreknowledge of Abram's positive decisions became the basis of God's choice in time).

God needed to separate Abram from his family and environment. God gave Abram a threefold command to accomplish this separation: 1) leave his country; 2) leave his father's house; and 3) leave his relatives (Ge 12:1). When one combines a careful reading of the account in Genesis 11:31-12:6 with Acts 7:1-4, the sequence of events becomes clear.

- ❑ Genesis 11:27-32 make it quite clear that it was Ur of the Chaldeans, not Haran, that was the place of Abram's birth.
- ❑ The command given to Abram to leave "your country" is understood by some to be the place of his birth.⁴
- ❑ This would imply that Abram actually took his father to Haran with him contrary to God's explicit command in Genesis 12:1 to get out "from your father's house." This is also true of Abram allowing his nephew Lot to accompany him, unless there is some God sanctioned reason why Lot would have been allowed to accompany Abram, e.g. the death of Lot's father, Haran, recorded in 11:28. This event would have made Abram, Haran's brother, be the guardian of Lot. However, it is interesting to note that it is not until Abram separates from Lot in Genesis 13:14-17, thus fulfilling God's command to separate from family, that God appears to Abram again and reiterates the promises initially stated in 12:1-3.
- ❑ This is supported by Stephen's account of these events recorded in Acts 7:1-4 where Stephen explicitly states that God appeared to Abram while he was still in Ur.
- ❑ The promises and commands stated in Genesis 12:1-3 are antecedent to 11:31.
 - This order is also consistent with the fact that Genesis 11:31, which seems to indicate that it was Terah who initiated the departure from Ur, is a part of a genealogy

⁴ Kenneth L. Barker & John Kohlenberger III, consulting editors, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Volume 1 – Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 21.

in which the fathers are being emphasized. Terah was the father of Abram, therefore in this chronology, Terah, not Abram, would be the focus of attention.

- Abram took Terah with him to Haran. Abram settled there for some time since he acquired a number of possessions while he was in Haran (Ge 12:4-6).
- It is possible that the call of Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 is connected to the dispersion of the city of Babylon in Genesis 11:1-9.

It is important to note that God did not adopt an existing family or tribe. Rather, He radically altered the life of one man, Abram, by appearing to him (Acts 7:2) and calling him to be the “father” of a new chosen and set apart people. The process of setting apart began with Abram, who upon the death of Terah, would have become the leader of the family group. God’s requirements for Abram were very demanding because they caused him to leave his semi-permanent dwelling, his clan, and his immediate family and become a nomad. Only those who had been defeated and who were uprooted and poverty stricken would go without a land to call home. Only faith in God’s promise of a land, of seed and blessing could initiate such behavior!

The Relationship of the Abrahamic Covenant to the Other Covenants in Scripture – The Abrahamic Covenant consists of three essential aspects: land, seed and blessing. These three aspects of the Abrahamic covenant are amplified in the other unilateral covenants with Israel.

- The Palestinian or Land covenant (Deut 28-30) amplifies the *land* aspect.
- The Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:8-17) amplifies the *seed* aspect.
- The New covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:22-32) amplifies the *blessings* aspect.
- The Mosaic covenant (Ex 19:5ff; Deut 28:1-68) is the means by which God would set Israel apart from other nations and peoples as Israel adhered to its stipulations. It is the only conditional or bilateral covenant.

Thus, the Abrahamic covenant is the fountainhead from which the other covenants flow.

The Ratification of the Covenant – (Ge 15 & 17) – Immediately after the recapture of his nephew Lot from Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him (Ge 14:1-17), the king of Sodom, who was among the kings and peoples who had been previously conquered by Chedorlaomer, attempted to establish a negotiating position with Abram (Ge 14:17 cf. 14:22). Abram declines the spoils of victory offered to him by the king of Sodom. In a demonstration of God’s approval and in order to bolster Abram’s faith, God reiterates His threefold promise to Abram concerning the land, seed and blessing aspects of His covenant. God then confirms this reaffirmation with a blood covenant (Ge 15:8-21). Since only one animal was necessary for this covenant, the multiplicity of animals emphasizes the solemn nature and importance of the covenant. Normally, both parties passed through the pieces of the animal, thus mutually binding themselves to an unalterable covenant. However, here, Abram is placed into a deep sleep (15:12) and God alone passes through the pieces (15:17). Therefore, the existence and continuance of the covenant did not depend upon Abram, but God.

Immediately following Abram’s lapse of faith in Genesis 16 whereby he attempted to fulfill God’s promise apart from God, Abram is the recipient of God’s lovingkindness and faithfulness. God again reiterates the covenant promises to Abram (17:1-8). Abram’s name (high, exalted father) is changed to Abraham (father of many nations). Circumcision is instituted (17:9-14) as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant.

Eschatological Implications of the Abrahamic Covenant – Even though this covenant is ancient from our perspective now, it has several eschatological implications:

- The nation Israel and the physical seed of Abraham must be perpetuated.
- If Israel is to possess the land forever, they must exist forever.
- In spite of Israel’s disobedience, they will one day inherit the Land and reside there as a blessed nation.
- Israel will be the channel of blessing for all the nations of the earth.

- ❑ Abraham, Issac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons who shared their fathers' faith and covenant eligibility will be resurrected and placed in everlasting possession of the land (Matt 22:23-32; Acts 26:6-8; Heb 11:13).
- ❑ During the period in which Israel has been set aside as the recipient of the land, seed and spiritual blessings due to her status of unbelief, the church is the recipient of some of the same spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant which are later amplified in the New Covenant (e.g. forgiveness of sin, spiritual regeneration, and the indwelling Holy Spirit). This fact certainly represents a partial fulfillment of the "blessings" aspect of the Abrahamic covenant even though it is occurring during a period that was not foreseen by the prophets of old. The church in resurrection bodies will witness and participate in the final fulfillment of the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant during the Messiah's Messianic reign.

Is the Church the New Israel That Fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant? - Some use Galatians 3 to attempt to prove this point. Since Christ is the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), those who are in Christ are also the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:29). They argue that since the church is clearly the seed of Abraham, the promises of the Abrahamic covenant must somehow be seen as fulfilled in the church. Therefore, the promises of the land must be spiritualized or seen as set aside permanently due to Israel's disobedience. While it is true that believers who are in Christ are the seed of Abraham, they are the spiritual seed. Paul's point in Galatians 3 is that Gentiles who are in Christ inherit the universal blessings aspect of the Abrahamic covenant only as Gentiles without having to become Jews or becoming subject to the Law. There is a distinction between the physical seed of Abraham who do not possess Abraham's faith, the physical descendants who do possess his faith and spiritual descendants of Abraham who inherit the universal blessings, but who are not Abraham's physical seed.