

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

BIBLE TEXT : Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-8; 22:15-18

LESSON 157 Junior and Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

² And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

³ And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 17:1-8

¹ And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

² And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

³ And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

⁴ As for me, behold, my covenant *is* with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

⁵ Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

⁶ And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

The tenth chapter of Genesis, preceding the above quotation of Scripture, has well been termed "The Table of Nations," for therein are listed the descendants of Noah's sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and the respective areas of the earth they populated. The chapter closes with these words: "These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood" (Genesis 10:32).

Another significant portion of Scripture, intimately related to these nations, is Noah's prophecy concerning his sons: "And he said, Cursed be Canaan [Ham]; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem" (Genesis 9:25-27).

Also, in reference to the numerous descendants of Japheth, it is stated, "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations" (Genesis 10:5). These are said to be the nations that populated the continent of Europe, and eventually the Americas.

At this stage, after the dispersion of the nations, God set Himself to choose a people, as "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation," for His peculiar possession, to whom for many centuries God's dealings were of chief concern. Were then these other nations dismissed and forgotten? On the contrary, the fact that they were listed implies that God had not finished with them, but that they too would yet be included, as is confirmed in the Old Testament by the many prophecies of the call of the Gentiles. This Table of Nations therefore premises the world-wide scope, down through the centuries, of God's divine Plan, embracing all the nations, both small and great.

The Call of Abraham

Abram (later known as Abraham), of the family of Shem, was born in ancient Ur of the Chaldees among an idolatrous people, as were all the races of that age. But among the motley throngs of this eastern kingdom, God, who knoweth the hearts of men, singled out Abraham for His call. It is recorded that "Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there" (Genesis 11:31). Haran was far to the north, but this was the usual route to Canaan, and it was here that God spoke to Abraham. But the wording of the call, "Now the LORD had said unto Abram," would indicate that God had first called Abraham in Ur. And this is confirmed by the words of the Martyr Stephen, "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee" (Acts 7:2, 3). It is therefore apparent that it was out of idolatrous Ur of the Chaldees that God first called Abraham.

When this call was repeated at Haran and the Lord commanded Abraham to come "unto a land that I will shew thee," God's great purpose in calling this man was revealed. He said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." This meant separation, for a man of God in the days of the patriarchs was required to separate himself from the world and all its evils, even as in the days of the Christians (**2 Corinthians 6:14-18** ¹⁴ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? ¹⁶ And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them,

⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

⁸ And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Genesis 22:15-18

¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

¹⁶ And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*:

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;

¹⁸ And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹⁷ Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, ¹⁸ And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty). And it is stated that Abraham took his family and gathered his substance, "and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; **and into the land of Canaan they came**" (Genesis 12:5), which reveals Abraham's implicit **obedience**. **Obedience to the will of God** is another requirement laid down in His Word for the man of God. Abraham's name has gone down in history as the "Father of Faith." But the terms "to believe" and "to obey" are virtually synonymous in the Bible. "Faith" and "obedience" go hand in hand.

Also it is recorded that Abraham, upon moving into the land of Canaan, pitched his tent near a spot called Bethel, "and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD" (Genesis 12:8). And when, after an absence, he returned to the land, he would **proceed** immediately to that spot, and call again upon the name of the Lord. This reveals that Abraham was also a **man of prayer** who faithfully communed with the God of his salvation. Jacob was the one who named this place (formerly known as Luz) Bethel, which means "house of God," for it was at this sacred spot that Jacob saw that heavenly vision called "Jacob's Ladder." God, in calling Abraham, therefore had chosen a man whom He could use.

Called to Be a Blessing

Attached to Abraham's call were certain promises. God declared to him, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great." He promised that his seed should be as the sand of the seashore and the stars of heaven for number. But God did not limit His blessings to Abraham; nor even to his posterity. Continuing He said, "And thou shalt be a blessing . . . **and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed**." These words hark back to the "Table of Nations," revealing God's great purpose in His call to Abraham. Of such wide scope was this purpose, that God included in His plan all kindreds, nations, and tongues, in order that eventually there should accrue to them the blessings promised to Abraham. Thus we can see the significance of Noah's prophecy: "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem."

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

"And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

"And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, "As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

"Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

"And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

"And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Genesis 17:1-8).

This important portion of Scripture reveals that God was bringing Abraham into a deeper experience and a closer walk with the Lord than is unfolded in his call out of Ur of the Chaldees, for He said: "I am the Almighty God; **walk before me, and be thou perfect**." So overpowering was the holy Presence of the Almighty here, that Abraham fell on his face. He was already a justified man, for in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis it is written: "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. **And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness**" (Genesis 15:5, 6). And this the Apostle Paul declares was an indication of justification by faith (**Romans 4:3** ³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness). Here also Abraham immediately began to deepen his consecration unto the Lord, which was typified by the sacrifices offered (**Genesis 15:9-11** ⁹ And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. ¹⁰ And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. ¹¹ And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. **Romans 12:1-2** ¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service*. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the

renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God). And the profound consecration which he made was accepted of the Lord, indicated by "a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (Genesis 15:17), which was as fire falling upon the sacrifices (**Leviticus 9:24** ²⁴ And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: *which* when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces). When therefore the Lord commanded him "Walk before me, and be thou perfect," Abraham, no doubt, was sanctified wholly, for sanctification is a perfecting work in the heart that enables a believer thus to walk (**Luke 1:74-75** ⁷⁴ That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life), and to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2).

We have already seen that the call of Abraham was for the purpose that God might carry out a divine Plan of world-wide scope. But before Abraham could be used, a perfecting work had to be wrought to make him a fit instrument in God's hands.

The Covenant with Abraham

We now find that Abraham's call has developed into a solemn Covenant. A covenant is defined as "an agreement between persons." This Covenant was thus an agreement between God and Abraham. God Himself was the Author of it. Specified therein were the requirements binding upon Abraham, and also the promises which God Himself would fulfill. This was therefore a most solemn Covenant, because, in the first place, it was entered into with the Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and earth; and, in the second place, it concerned not Abraham's welfare alone, nor that of his posterity, but was of great importance to "**all families of the earth.**" Who can comprehend the love of God which encompasses the utmost bounds of a sinful world!

When Abraham made that deep and solemn consecration unto the Lord, and the fire of Heaven had fallen upon the sacrifices, it is written that "in the same day the LORD made a **covenant** with Abram" (Genesis 15:18). In the seventeenth chapter, it is further stated: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an **everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed** after thee" (Genesis 17:7). That *is* just how serious and how far-reaching this Covenant was — an Everlasting Covenant into which succeeding generations were privileged to enter, that they might enjoy its blessings, and that Abraham's God might be their God. The "succeeding generations" are not limited just to Abraham's posterity, for we read again, "As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father **of many nations.**" At this point his name Abram was changed to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude."

Another great promise is attached to this Covenant. "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." This land extended from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates, according to God's Covenant with Abraham, and was promised to Abraham's posterity: "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18). This promise was fulfilled to the letter in the golden era of King Solomon's reign: "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river [Euphrates] unto the land, of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:20, 21).

This Promised Land was included in the Everlasting Covenant made with Abraham, and was further 'Promised as an everlasting possession to Abraham's children. And had the Israelites in the days of their prosperity continued obedient to their God, as Moses again and again enjoined them when they were about to cross Jordan, the land would never have passed out of their possession. But at the end of Solomon's reign the nation became divided. Ten tribes formed a kingdom in the north under the rule of Jeroboam, who taught Israel to sin, while Judah and Benjamin remained in the south. But eventually all twelve tribes lapsed into gross idolatry, and God permitted them to be carried into captivity and scattered among the nations. Their beautiful Temple was sacked and destroyed; their beloved city was burned; and their fruitful land became a desert waste. Palestine for many centuries was little more than a pasture land, in the possession of their enemies.

But God ever remembered the Covenant He made with Israel's fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Scriptures abound with promises that in the last days all Israel shall be gathered into the Promised Land, and that a remnant shall survive the Great Tribulation and turn to their Messiah when He appears again. The land shall then become an everlasting **possession**. Thus the Scriptures reveal that through the Covenant made with Abraham, his children shall fill an important place, in the last days, in God's great Plan. For at Jerusalem shall the "throne" of David be established, "and the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be

one LORD, and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9).

"And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

"And said, 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 sea shore; 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" (Genesis 22:15-18).

This twenty-second chapter opens with these words: "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt [try] Abraham, and said **unto** him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which **I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22 :1, 2).**

Abraham was seventy-five years old when, in response to God's call, he came into the land of Canaan. And among the promises which God made him, because of his obedience, was the promise that his posterity should be as the sand of the seashore; and He also promised Abraham a son. This man of God, no doubt, well knew that the Lord God of Heaven **had not said**, just for Abraham's fame: "I will make of thee a great nation, and **I** will bless thee, and make thy name great"; but that through his posterity, in some mysterious way which God had not fully revealed, this amazing Plan of His should lead on to that outstanding promise, **"In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."** Yet year after year went by, and this promise concerning his posterity was not fulfilled, even in part — no son was born. Abraham's faith — for by faith are God's promises fulfilled — was tried for twenty-five years. And at last, Abraham, in his old age, witnessed its fulfillment: Isaac, the son of promise, was born.

And then, some years later, came this strange command out of Heaven, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering." The effect of these words, as they fell unexpectedly upon Abraham's ears, needs no explanation. They cut deeply. But he knew that the Lord had spoken. He kept his own counsel, and rising early the next morning, saddled his ass, took two of his young men, Isaac his son, the wood for the "burnt offering," and departed for the land of Moriah. It was a three- days' journey; and seeing the place afar off, he said to the young men: "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." On their way Isaac spoke, saying, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" "My son," replied the father, "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

How prophetic were those words: "God will provide himself a lamb"! Whether Abraham foresaw that Promise to which the offering up of his own son pointed, or through what conflict Abraham was passing on his trip to Mount Moriah, we know not. But one thing he knew: God had spoken. "So they went both of them together." He built the altar. He laid the wood in order. "And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son," when, lo, the angel of the Lord called out of Heaven, "Abraham, Abraham." "And he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest **God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine** only son from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and beheld behind him a ram caught in a thicket by the horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering **in the stead of** his son — a vicarious sacrifice.

It is needless to say that Abraham went through deep waters and no doubt suffered greatly in carrying out the command which **God** gave him. The earthly possession that lay nearest to his heart was Isaac, not only because Isaac was his only son but in him was the hope of that promise that Abraham's seed should be as the sand of the seashore and the stars of heaven for number. Abraham, like the other prophets of old, saw these promises afar off, but yet he knew that in some mysterious way these things were intimately connected with the divine Plan of God. And now God was about to reveal some deeper things about this Everlasting Covenant into which Abraham had entered. Therefore, by this trial of

faith, Abraham, the father of faith, was being drawn into a closer, closer walk with his God. God does not reveal the mysteries of godliness by a mental process in man, as man would have it. He goes deeper, and often leads His own by deeper depths to higher heights through trial as He did with Jephthah, as He did with Job, and as He did with Abraham — and as some day He may do with us. God was at this time reaching for that affection which lay close to Abraham's heart. And Abraham stood the test. He proved himself to be able to take the "strong meat," and thus became a more efficient instrument in God's hands.

The Covenant Confirmed with an Oath

Now as to this Covenant which we see was being revealed to Abraham step by step: "And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son"; these words disclose more than ever how solemn was this Covenant which God established with Abraham. God said, "By myself have I sworn," because He could swear by none greater. Zacharias prophesied that God had visited His people to remember the oath He swore to Abraham. The Apostle, in commenting upon it, said: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (Hebrews 6: 13-17). A marginal note states that this last clause literally means, "Interposed himself by an oath."

In the establishing of this solemn Covenant, we have found that God took the initiative at every step. He was the Author of it from start to finish. God, Himself, made every promise contained therein. And there were many such promises which concerned not only Abraham's welfare, and that of his posterity, but the Covenant was so far-reaching that it concerned the welfare of "all families of the earth." And to these sweeping promises, God, the immutable God, at last bound Himself with an oath. Thus there is attached to this Covenant the assurance that every blessed promise therein will be carried out to the letter. So here we have a Covenant confirmed by an oath from God Himself. Other portions of Scripture will reveal how God is carrying out, step by step, the gracious promises He made.

Another important provision of this Covenant is the place that Abraham was to fill in the establishing of it. In a covenant between men, the covenant is one part, and the parties to it are another part. But Abraham, from the day of his call to the trial of his faith, seemed to be a part of the Covenant itself. The deep trial through which he passed was more than just an experience of Abraham's. That trial led to the oath by which that far-reaching Covenant was confirmed. And that portion of Scripture closes with these words: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

It is a solemn and serious transaction for man, a creature of the dust, to enter into a Covenant with the Most High God. He takes a sacred vow upon him, and binds himself to the same conditions which bound Abraham — implicit obedience to the eternal God. Thus only will he find the promises of God fulfilled.

"He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.

"Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac;

"And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant" (Psalm 105:8-10).