

Week 4: The Covenant with Abraham

A. The Background of the Abrahamic Covenant

- The Covenant of Works was broken in the Garden (Genesis 1-3)
- God immediately promised that a Savior would come through the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15)
- In the covenant with Noah, God promised to preserve the world in order to fulfill His promise (Gen 6-9)
- God calls Abraham out of his idolatry to be the line of the promised "seed" (Genesis 12; cf. Josh 24:2)
- This marks the beginning of the Old Covenant and the Kingdom of Israel
- It is through this kingdom that the Covenant of Grace is progressively revealed throughout the Old Testament

B. The Biblical Development Abrahamic Covenant¹

1) The Initiation of the Covenant (Genesis 12:1-7)

- The Federal Head: Abram
- The Promises:
 - The Land of Canaan (vv. 1, 7)
 - A Great Nation (v. 2)
 - A Blessing for all Nations (v. 3)

2) The Confirmation of the Covenant (Genesis 15:1-21)

- Promises Repeated:
 - The Land of Canaan (v. 7, 18)
 - A Great Nation (i.e. "Numerous Offspring") (v. 5)
- God Imposes Sanctions Upon Himself (vv. 17-21)
 - Sanctions guarantee covenant commitments or oaths
 - God guarantees His oath by imposing sanctions on Himself — i.e. passing through the carcasses (v. 17)

3) The Expansion of the Covenant (Genesis 17:1-14)

- Promises Repeated:
 - The Land of Canaan (v. 8)
 - A Great Nation ("multiply you exceedingly") (v. 2)
 - Father of Nations (vv. 4-5)
- Covenant Expanded:
 - Promise of Royalty (v. 6; cf. Genesis 17:16; 35:11)
 - Requirement of Loyalty (vv. 10-14)
 - ◆ Abram and his descendants must "keep" the covenant through circumcision (vv. 10-13)
 - ◆ If any one fails to be circumcised, he will be "cut off" from God's people (v. 14)
 - ◆ Circumcision represented the people's obligation to keep the Law of God in order to inherit the blessing (Galatians 5:3; Romans 2:25; Acts 15:10)

¹ This section is largely based on Samuel Renihan's book, *The Mystery of Christ*, chapter 6

Summary

1. The Promises:
 1. Father of Many Nations (Including Kings)
 2. A Great Nation and a Multitude of Offspring
 3. The Land of Canaan
 4. Offspring (i.e. "Seed") that would bring blessing to all the nations
2. This Covenant was Both Conditional and Unconditional:
 - Unconditional: God will certainly make Abraham's offspring a great nation in the land of Canaan and He will certainly bring blessing to all the nations through Abraham's "Seed"
 - Conditional: Each individual descendant must "keep" the covenant through circumcision or be "cut off" from the promises. Although the promises were nationally guaranteed, they were not individually guaranteed.

C. The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant

1. Father of Many Nations (Midian, Gen 25:4; Jacob/Israel, Gen 28:13, 13; Esau, Gen 36:1-43)
2. A Great Nation and a Multitude of Offspring (1 Kings 4:20; Hebrews 11:12)
3. The Land of Canaan (Joshua 21:43-45; Nehemiah 9:7-8)
4. The Offspring ("Seed") Who Would Bless the Nations—Jesus Christ (Gal 3:8, 16; Lk 1:54-55 and 1:68, 72-75)

D. The Abrahamic Covenant and the Story of Redemption

1. The Abrahamic Covenant lays the Foundation for the Entire Old Covenant
 - It establishes the identity of the nation of Israel throughout the Old Testament (Exod 32:13; Psalm 105:6-11)
 - It Anticipates the Mosaic Covenant (i.e. the condition of obedience to positive laws)
 - It Anticipates the Davidic Covenant (i.e. the promise of "kings")
2. The Abrahamic Covenant Reveals the New Covenant through Promise and Typology:
 - It reveals the New Covenant through promise:
 - ♦ The promised "Seed" through whom the nations will be blessed
 - It reveals the New Covenant through "typology":
 - ♦ The land of Canaan is a type of the New Earth (Hebrews 11:9-10; Romans 4:13)
 - ♦ The nation of Israel is a type of the Church (Galatians 3:29; Romans 2:28-29; Phil 3:2; Eph 2:11-19)
 - ♦ Circumcision pictures the renewal of heart that is accomplished through the New Covenant (Col 2:11-14)

E. How Were People Saved in the Abrahamic Covenant?

- o Abraham was saved through faith alone (Genesis 15:6; cf. Rom 4:3; John 8:56; Heb 11:10, 39-40; Gal 3:8)
- o The Abrahamic Covenant could not offer salvation in itself, but it pointed to the grace of the New Covenant

Differences with our Paedobaptist Brothers and Sisters

Paedobaptist View:

- The Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant both belong to the same overarching Covenant of Grace
- They are different “administrations” of the Covenant of Grace, but they contain the same “substance”
- The New Covenant is not really “new” covenant, but a continuation of the Old in a new and fuller form
- Therefore, the essential contents of the Abrahamic Covenant continue into the New Covenant
- Since children were included in the Covenant with Abraham, they are also included in the New Covenant
- This is the basis for infant baptism

Reformed Baptist View:

- The Abrahamic Covenant pictures and promises the New Covenant, but it is not the same thing
- They are two different covenants containing two different substances (physical/temporal vs. spiritual/eternal)
- Since the two covenants are different in substance, what was true of the Old is not necessarily true of the New
- Children were automatically included in the Old by birth, but only believers are included in the New Covenant
- This is why we do not baptize infants

Differences with our Dispensational Brothers and Sisters

Dispensationalist View:

- God’s Covenant with Abraham establishes physical Israel as the unique, permanent nation of God
- God still has a special plan for Abraham’s physical descendants
- The church remains distinct from Israel in God’s plan and purpose
- There are promises yet to be fulfilled for Israel that do not apply to the church

Reformed Baptist View:

- Israel fulfilled a particular role within a certain period of redemptive history under the Old Covenant
- Once the Messiah came He ushered in an entirely New Covenant of grace, making the Old obsolete
- Now, it is not the *physical* descendants who are Abraham’s children and heirs, but his *spiritual* descendants
- It is not the *physical* circumcision, but those who are *circumcised of heart* who are the true Israel (Gal 6:15)