

The Abrahamic Covenant – Nehemiah 9:7-8

I. INTRODUCTION:

- A. I keep referring to this man, who is leading Israel in prayer, as *“our worship leader.”*
1. This evening I’m going to alter that just a bit – for **this** message, he is *“Israel’s worship leader.”*
 2. He refers to the covenant which God made with Abraham.
 3. As we shall see that is an agreement which involves Israel only – not you and me.
 4. But it is so important, that I want to bring it to your attention.
- B. To misunderstand the Abrahamic covenant creates doctrinal problems affecting a great many other areas.
1. For example, if we get this wrong our approach to **Bible prophecy** will be inaccurate.
 2. And for a great many people, to be wrong about this makes them wrong about **the Lord’s church**.
 3. On the other hand, to correctly understand the covenants of God should create in us **hearts of praise**.
 - a. God’s covenants are **examples of His grace**.
 - b. In God’s covenants we see **His handiwork**.
 - c. And in the completion of those covenants we see the **omnipotence of God**.
 4. There are many reasons to study the covenants of God, and yet admittedly this is not among the most exciting of Bible subjects.
- C. There are several divine covenants, but our consideration tonight is only with the one mentioned in this prayer.
1. *“Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham;*
 2. *And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him.”*

II. The Abrahamic covenant begins in Genesis 12:1-3.

- A. *“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.”*
- B. While still in the Chaldean city of Ur, Jehovah commanded Abram to leave his heathen family and friends and to follow the Lord into a new land.
1. And without any provocation or reason on Abram’s part, God said that He would make of him a great nation.
 2. The word *“nation”* speaks about a people with a common society.
 3. A *“nation”* has a common government, a common history, and a common future.
 4. In other words, the Lord promised to bless Abram, and to magnify his name and fame.
 5. He also said that He would respond in kind to the way that people responded kindly to Abram & his nation.
 6. Then finally, God promised to bless all the families of the earth through him.
 - a. It is my personal belief that this last thing is referring to the coming of the Saviour.
 - b. **Galatians 3:8-9** says, *“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*
 - c. *So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”*
 7. As in most of God’s major covenants with man, there are seven aspects to the agreement.
- C. What we to understand is that these promises made to Abram were spoken and understood to be literal.

III. This covenant was reiterated and expanded several times.

- A. Notice in the next chapter: **Genesis 13:14-17** – *“And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. and I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.”*

- B. The thing to notice in this passage is the use of **Abram's eyes**.
1. After he moved from Ur to Haran and eventually into the Canaan ...
 2. After Lot moved away from Abram and into Sodom, the Lord told His friend to use his eyes and to look in every possible direction.
 3. God promised to give Abram the land that he was standing on and every acre for miles and miles around.
- C. Not only was that land going to be his, it was going to be given to his "seed" which would follow him – referring to his descendants.
1. The primary descendant of Abram would eventually be the Lord Jesus Christ.
 2. But obviously, in this case, Christ is not the meaning, because this seed would become an innumerable host of people.
 3. And who is that seed which will be as impossible to number, like the dust of the earth?
 4. There is not the slightest hint anywhere in the context of **Genesis 12** or **13** that this is anything other than the "nation" which was first referred to.
 5. There are Protestant and Baptist Covenant Theologians who want to say that this seed is referring to those of us who have been saved by the same kind of grace as which saved Abraham.
 - a. Not only is there nothing in either of these two chapters which say that.
 - b. But if that is the case, then we should find Christ or Paul telling us to look forward to dwelling in the land of Israel at some point.
 - c. The promise here was in regard to a literal family dwelling in a literal piece of property.
- D. This promise is again reiterated in **Genesis 15:4-21**:
1. *"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?"*
 2. *And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*
 3. *And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. 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.*
 4. *And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? 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.*
 5. *And he took unto him all these, & divided them in the midst, & laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*
 6. *And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;*
 7. *And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.*
 8. *But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces."*
- E. Notice that God had promised Abram he would be the father of nation of numberless citizens.
1. But despite his old age, as yet he didn't have a single son.
 2. How can the Lord's promise be fulfilled without any heirs?
 3. What an opportunity to tell Abram that the Lord meant **spiritual** children instead of **literal** children, **IF** that was what the Lord intended.
 4. Anyway, Abram quarreled with God just a little bit about his childlessness.
 5. But the Lord restated and reemphasized His promise of literal children and multitudes of descendants.

- F. **Verse 22**, uses the word “*covenant*” for the first time, although the intent had been there all along.
1. And this passage shows us a little bit of the culture and practice of that time.
 2. When a covenant was made there was often a sacrifice – there was blood. But this was special.
 - a. God told Abram to take five different animals: an heifer, a goat, a ram a dove and a pigeon.
 - b. They were all slain, and then bisected and each half was laid opposite to its partner all in a bloody row with a path between them.
 3. Abram obeyed God explicitly and made sure that no vultures or ravens tried to eat the fresh, bloody meat.
 - a. But the Lord never came to complete the covenant ceremony, and in the mean time Abram fell asleep.
 - b. During his sleep a vivid, startling dream came to him.
 - c. He was told about Israel’s exile in Egypt for 400 years, and then about her return to occupy the land that had been previously promised.
 4. And then in the dream the covenant ceremony was completed, but with one major departure from the usual.
 - a. Instead of both parties walking between the bisected sacrifice...
 - b. Only symbols, representing the Lord, made the bloody walk – a smoking furnace and a burning lamp.
 5. The sacrifices and the blood were supposed to indicate that a blood agreement was being made.
 - a. In most cases, it was understood that just as the animals died, if one party failed to keep his end of the covenant, then his blood would be required.
 - b. But in this case, the promises were all on the Lord’s side, with nothing required of Abram.
 - c. And for that reason Abram was not asked to walk in the midst of the sacrifices.
- G. These promises were all **unconditional**, as far as Abraham was concerned.
1. And please notice once again the reference to Abram’s seed spending 400 years in Egypt.
 2. Again, this means that this is talking about the literal nation of Israel.
 3. I have heard preachers say that since Abram was counting stars, instead of dust, this refers to His **SPIRITUAL** descendants – Gentiles saved by the grace of God.
 4. That is reading more into these verses than we have warrant to do.
- H. There is still one more account of this covenant with Abram in **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. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.*
 2. *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.*
 - a. *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.*
 - b. *And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, & kings shall come out of thee.*
 - c. *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.*
 - d. *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.*
 - e. *And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.”*
- I. I think this passage should forever silence those who insist on demanding that Abraham’s seed be his **spiritual** descendants rather than national Israel.
1. This part of the covenant promises Abraham **many** nations and kings, rather than just one.
 2. I believe that **verses 5** and **6** are talking about Israel, the Ishmaelites, Edomites, Midianites, a variety of Arabs, Saracens, and others.
 3. And each of those peoples were, and are, literal earthly nations and tribes of people.

- J. But what about those New Testament scriptures which talk about today's Gentile Christians as being Abraham's children?
1. We **are** children of Abraham only in the sense that our faith is just like his faith.
 2. He was saved by grace; he was justified and declared righteous, in the same way that we are.
 3. But that has nothing to do with the promises that God is making to Abraham in these verses.
- K. And then we come to the matter of circumcision; something which I don't need to pursue very far.
1. Let it suffice to say that circumcision is **not speaking** about **faith in Christ**, and it is definitely **not baptism**.
 2. It was a literal act, carried out by the literal descendants of Abraham.
- L. But **verse 9** does raise another interesting thought.
1. Abraham and his children were ordered to practice circumcision as an illustration of the covenant.
 - a. So does that mean that circumcision is a condition to the covenant?
 - b. If Israel failed to maintain this God-prescribed rite, would the covenant be voided?
 - c. Absolutely not!
 2. Just because God gave that man and his descendants a certain responsibility...
 - a. it didn't mean that if they failed to keep their responsibility that God would nullify the contract.
 - b. There are covenants like that...
 - c. but since it was not specifically stated in this case, disobedience did not end this covenant.
 3. This was an unconditional covenant based upon the Lord alone.
 4. And this is why Israel's prayer leader refers to it.
- M. At this point I could go on and show you that the Lord reiterated this covenant with both Isaac and Jacob, but I'll let you research that on your own.

IV. So what did the Abrahamic covenant contain?

- A. The Lord said, *"I will make of thee a great nation."*
1. I believe that this is referring to the literal nation of Israel.
 2. *"I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee."*
 - a. This is referring to much of the Arab world today, through Ishmael and Esau.
 3. *"I will bless thee."* Which was fulfilled in both earthly and heavenly prosperity.
 4. *"I will make thy name great."* And no name is more honored outside the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 5. *"Thou shalt be a blessing."* This is referring primarily to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ
 6. *"I will give unto thee the land."*
 - a. At first it was restricted to what Abraham could see with his naked eye.
 - b. But then in **chapter 15** it was extended to cover everything from the River of Egypt into Iraq and Iran.
 - c. And it will be literally fulfilled during the Millennial Kingdom.
 7. Then last, God said, *"I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee."*
 - a. We see this fulfilled throughout the rest of the Old Testament.
 - b. We see it in subsequent histories of Rome and Greece.
 - c. We have seen it fulfilled in Russia and Germany in our parents' and grandparent's generations.
 - d. And as wicked, secular and unbelieving as the nation of Israel is today, it is still a promise in effect.
 - e. I believe that the United States, under its current President, is following a wise policy of aiding Israel.
- B. The Abrahamic covenant should be understood as a literal promise to Abraham and his sons –
1. First to Isaac, and then Jacob and Jacob's twelve sons.
 2. If we get this wrong, and choose to apply this covenant spiritually, we loose our interpretational footing and bring into doubt any and every statement that the Word of God ever makes.
 3. These things, once again, make this a rather important doctrine.

