

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

By S. J. LINDSAY

Church of God General Conference: McDonough, GA, <https://coggc.org/>



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CHAPTER I

WHAT IS THE COVENANT?

IN the earlier days of our church, we were known as The Churches of God of the Faith of Abraham. As a body of believers we still stand or fall on that faith. Without recognition of the importance of the covenant made with Abraham, we have no excuse for our existence as a separate and distinct people.

In the studies which follow we will endeavor to be as brief as possible, but ask that the reader weigh carefully each point of evidence presented.

First of all, What is a covenant?

A covenant is a contract or agreement between two or more parties.

Through transgression, man was found in sin and devoid of lasting life. He had forfeited his life through sin. He had only to face a return to the ground from which he had been taken. This was his lot. But God had a desire to the work of His hands (Job 14:15). He sought out a faithful man through whom to begin a work of redemption of man from the death into which he had plunged himself. In Abraham he found this man. God gives a reason for selecting him. "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of

the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:17-19).

Briefly it is recorded in Genesis 17:7, 8: "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."

This covenant has been confirmed repeatedly since, as we read: "He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; and hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying, Unto you will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance; when ye were but few, even a few, and strangers in it" (1 Chron. 16:14-19).

No other everlasting covenant has been given to man. All promises to man point to the earth as his everlasting home. Christ is linked up with this covenant in the language which follows: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

In Christ the inheritance seems to have expanded

still further: "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13).

Fallen man may become partaker of this inheritance by observing certain things to do them. He must become an heir to the inheritance promised to Abraham through Christ: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27-29).

The earth, then, renewed and cleansed from sin, is to be righteous man's everlasting home. So far as heaven's being man's final abiding place is concerned, we have but to read the language of Jesus: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). And Peter, speaking of David, has this to say: "For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool" (Acts 2:34, 35).

Other evidences, showing what is the promised inheritance, may be found in the following quotations: "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. . . . But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight

themselves in the abundance of peace. . . . For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. . . . The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. . . . Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it" (Psalm 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34). "The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth" (Prov. 10:30). "For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it" (Prov. 2:21, 22). "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9, 10).

Faith in God's promises is made the standard of righteousness. It is by these promises that we become partakers of the divine nature. Belief in something else will not do, neither may we lay belief aside and trust in our good works: "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh

not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:2-5). "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given to us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:1-4).

This language is clear and plain. It covers the ground of God's promise to Abraham, and to us through Jesus Christ. We have given only a small part of the scriptures bearing upon the subject. It stands to reason that if another everlasting promise is given in the Bible indicating an eternal inheritance elsewhere, then none of the promises can be sure. A clear understanding of this matter is very necessary, since salvation is made to depend upon faith in these promises.

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CHAPTER II

SEALING THE COVENANT

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? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in mine house is mine heir. 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. 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?" (Gen. 15:1-8).

The last question in the above quotation from Genesis at first seems to be a strange one in the light of the fact that Abram had been so faithful in believing God. God had promised Abram the possession. Why could he not accept it with the same assurance with which he received the other promises? It is not so strange after all when we come to consider that this inheritance was made an *everlasting* inheritance. Nat-

urally the question that arose in Abram's mind was, How can I accept or receive an everlasting inheritance while I myself am not everlasting? To answer this, God shows Abram by a vision that it is not to come in this life. The only conclusion, then, is that Abram, believing God, must conclude that he was to rise from the dead. Stephen says in Acts 7 that Abraham never received so much as to set his foot on. Later on, by other evidence, God fully assured Abram of a resurrection, by the manner in which He kept His word with him to give him a son out of his own loins. At this time Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah was well stricken in years. She also had been barren through life. Respecting this matter, Paul says: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

Abraham was to be put to the test to see if his faith was strong enough to yield obedience to God's commandments. When the lad, Isaac, was about fourteen years of age, God gave commandment (Gen. 22) that Abraham take that son to the mountain to offer him in sacrifice. Abraham yielded immediate obedience to the will of God. Many careless remarks as to Abraham's sanity have been made by skeptics and infidels

with regard to his obedience in this matter. Abraham knew something these did not know. We are told about it in Hebrews 11:17-19: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

Abraham's reasoning was of the best sort. God had given him evidence of His power to do what He said He would do. Abraham believed it, and when the test came, was ready to perform the part of faith. He knew that God, who could give him a son out of the dead condition of their bodies, could also return that son to him even though he be taken in death as a sacrifice. Abraham's question, How shall I know that I shall receive it? gives no hint that he thought he would be more alive than ever when dead, as popular teaching now advocates. He knew that there would be no chance for him to possess an everlasting inheritance when he was dead. He also sought assurance from God that some means would be provided for life out of death that he might enter into the inheritance. He received the assurance that God is able to raise up the dead. And Abraham became possessed of the faith that even though death strikes down, yet God is able to raise up the dead to the inheritance promised. This is the gospel, or good news, the glad tidings. So we read in Galatians 3:8: "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."

Paul tells us: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

We now wish to turn our attention to the sealing of this covenant. When this covenant was made and accepted, then came the sealing: "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" (Heb. 6:13, 14).

Church of Christ, Bible Institute of Washington, D.C., at <http://www.bibleinstitute.org/>
And on Abraham's part we read: "And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised" (Rom. 4:11).

It is with this seal that we now wish to deal. This contract was between God and Abraham, and when the contract, or covenant, was made, then came the sealing. Abraham exercised faith in the content of the contract before he signed, or sealed, it, for circumcision sealed a faith already expressed before the circumcision took place. In everyday business circles men do not seal or sign articles until they understand their content. Paul especially emphasizes this fact in Romans 4. To our way of thinking, this is a very im-

portant matter to take into consideration. The covenant between God and Abraham is the same covenant under which we stand. It was entered into between them after an understanding of the terms of the contract. When this understanding was evidenced on Abraham's part, he was then required to sign it in his own blood by the rite of circumcision. He was circumcised *after* exercising faith in the covenant. The sealing made the contract legal between them, so to speak. It then became binding. God is under oath to Abraham by swearing by His own name because He could swear by no greater, and Abraham by the rite of circumcision. In circumcision the filth of the flesh was done away in figure. Circumcision is a figure of death and resurrection, for it signifies the shedding of blood and doing away with the filth of the flesh. This will actually take place with us in resurrection if we remain faithful and are found worthy at the coming of our Lord.

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CHAPTER III

THE SEAL OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

WE continue our discussion of the seal of faith. Abraham's faith in the covenant was sealed by circumcision. We have shown that our faith must be in keeping with that of Abraham, and we now quote Bible evidence to make this statement good: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but *who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham*, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:11-13).

Here we learn that we must walk in the steps of that faith which Abraham exercised. The question may be asked, Have Christians, or those who would become Christians, any seal by which to seal this covenant before God? Our answer is, Yes. For we read, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after

the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also *ye are circumcised* with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; *buried with him in baptism*, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:6-12).

Read the foregoing carefully to see that baptism holds the same relation to the covenant with us that circumcision held with Abraham. This will lead you to see the importance of baptism in connection with Christian faith. The question is often asked, "Do you think baptism is essential to salvation?" We ask, "Do you think circumcision was essential in Abraham's case?" Again we ask, "Would Abraham's circumcision have amounted to anything if it had been done before he knew the terms of the covenant God was about to propose to him?" Does baptism applied to them who know not the gospel of Christ, the covenant made with Abraham, do them any good?

As to the saving quality of baptism, let us read: "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us . . . by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:20, 21).

And again: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16).

We believe that this is sufficient evidence to any who have a desire to obey God's revealed plan.

Peter preached the first gospel sermon under this great commission on the day of Pentecost. Let us see if this line of thought was followed by him. In Acts 2, beginning at the 22nd verse, we find this sermon running throughout the chapter. What did he preach? That Jesus was crucified and that He arose again from the dead to sit upon David's throne. He reasoned with the multitude of Jews that their thought that David was to be the Messiah was not sound, and turning to the Psalms he allowed David to convince them of their error. To tell them this message seems to have ended Peter's responsibility to them. He had preached the gospel to them and there his work came to a close; but they, being convinced, asked what they must do about it. Then he told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. Just a point we would like to emphasize, and that is that we have too many who are so anxious to get people into the waters of baptism, that they coax and tease and urge them to go before they have the proper understanding, thus bringing many into the body who are not prepared for the responsibilities of the Christian life. When the preacher has told them the gospel message

and shown the responsibility resting upon them, if this message doesn't work, no man should attempt to supplant the Word with his personality. One trouble with us is that too many of our own people fail to see the worth of *faith* in the things which God has declared and conclude that after all maybe it makes little difference what we believe, just so we try to live right. This is a sad mistake.

In Acts, chapter 8, we read of the work of Philip with the eunuch. Read the story carefully. Note the eagerness of the eunuch to learn the gospel. He asked Philip to instruct him, which he did. Philip must have done the work thoroughly, for the eunuch was led to ask, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" "If thou believest, thou mayest," came the answer. Then he confessed that he believed that Jesus was the Christ referred to in that which he had been reading. When he made this confession, Philip baptized him. Read all other references to the ministry of the preachers whose work is recorded in the Acts and you will find this principle to apply in every case.

Being baptized thus into Christ makes us heirs, as we learn in Galatians 3:27-29. In Romans 8:16, 17 we find that we become not only heirs of God, but joint heirs with Christ, if so be we suffer with Him.

It is to the promises God made to Abraham that we must add the seven virtues named in 2 Peter 3. We are told here that these exceeding great and precious promises are able to give us the divine nature. Ques-

tion: Can we become partakers of the divine nature without a knowledge of these promises? Besides receiving the divine nature from this source, we are informed that suffering with Christ will cause us to be glorified with Him. Christ has uttered several promises to us by way of glory to be revealed to us in His kingdom. We are to sit with Him on His throne even as He also overcame and is set down with His Father on His throne. The saints are to be given power over the nations. They are to reign as kings and priests with Him in the earth. With these glorious promises added to the promise of eternal life in the earth cleansed from sin and to be made a place where there is no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, nor death, there should be incentive enough for anyone to do his very best.

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