

# The Promise to Abraham

by John F. Walvoord

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*The Abrahamic covenant is a divine promise to Abraham and his descendants, outlining God's purpose for Israel and the nations.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1, Genesis 15:18, Jeremiah 31:36, Romans 9:6, Galatians 3:6, Hebrews 6:13, James 1:1

**Topics:** "Biblical Prophecy", "Eschatology"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the theology of Biblical prophecy, particularly eschatology, emphasizing the importance of understanding the major divisions of divine revelation and the significance of the Abrahamic covenant in relation to God's prophetic program for Israel. He contrasts the orthodox view of prophecy as authoritative and predictive with the modern concept of 'realized' eschatology, which diminishes specific future predictions. Walvoord argues for a literal interpretation of prophecy, especially in the context of the Abrahamic covenant, highlighting the distinctions between the natural seed of Abraham, spiritual Israel, and Gentile believers as the seed of Abraham. He refutes the idea of conditional promises in the Abrahamic covenant, asserting its unconditional nature and affirming the unchanging purpose of God for Israel's eternal existence and possession of the land.

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## Transcript

In approaching the study of eschatology, the theology of Biblical prophecy, one is plunged immediately into a major division of divine revelation which is determinative in theology as a whole. Eschatology is the doctrine of last things, the word being derived from eschatos, meaning last, and logos, referring to theology as a rational science. In its larger dimension, it includes all that was prophetically future at the time it was revealed. This is subject to further subdivision into eschatology which has been fulfilled and eschatology which is still future or unfulfilled.

In modern theology this simple definition has become obscured. The modern concept of "realized" eschatology reduces its status to that of divine purpose. By so doing, it robs eschatology of its quality of specific prediction of the future. This point of view is based on the idea that it is impossible for anyone, even for writers of the Word of God, to predict the future.

Orthodox theology, however, has never submitted to such a limitation and throughout the history of the church it has been assumed that the Bible can speak authoritatively on things to come. Though there is evident difference of opinion as to how prophecy should be interpreted, the orthodox position does not question the authenticity of prophecy itself. In this discussion, it is assumed that the Bible in its original

writings was given by inspiration of God and is an infallible revelation of His mind and purpose. The problem before us then is not one of demonstrating the validity of prophecy or the accuracy of the Scriptures. It is rather one of theological induction and interpretation of the revelation given in the Bible.

### Major Divisions Of The Divine Program

In order to approach the subject of eschatology intelligently, some principle of organization must be adopted in the interpretation of the broad and extensive field of Scriptural prophecy. Among a number of possibilities, two such principles may be mentioned by way of introduction.

First, the eschatological program of God may be considered in four major divisions: (1) The program for angels, including the present ministry and future blessedness of the elect angels and the present activity and future damnation of fallen angels, usually embraced in the branch of systematic theology called satanology. (2) The program of God for Gentiles embodied in the broad provisions of God's covenant with Adam and Noah and subsequently unfolded in the visions given to the Prophet Daniel in the book that bears his name. Included in God's program for the Gentiles is provision for the salvation of those who turn to God in true faith. (3) The divine program for Israel is unfolded in the Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and new covenants and in a large measure is unfolded as the principal subject of the Old Testament beginning in Genesis 12. It includes all of God's dealings with Israel in the past and predicts a consummation in the future, when a time of great tribulation will befall the nation. The time of tribulation will be followed by Israel's regathering, restoration, and glory in the millennial kingdom. It is this division which will constitute our area of study. (4) The divine program for the church unfolded in the New Testament consisting in the divine program in the present age and its eschatological consummation in the translation of the church, its judgment, and reward. As presented in the New Testament, it falls into two broad areas: (a) the professing church, i.e. Christendom, destined to become a world religion of apostate character before its ultimate judgment by God at the second coming of Christ; (b) the calling out of the true church, the body of Christ, within the professing church, composed of Jew and Gentile alike on equal basis joined by the baptism of the Spirit, placed in Christ, born again of the Spirit of God, and indwelt by the triune God. The salvation and sanctification of those who form the body of Christ is the central purpose of God in this present age and in some sense suspends the progress, of God's dealings with the Gentile nations and Israel until God's purpose for the church has been realized.

### Alternate Approach Of Covenant Theology

The fourfold division suggested for the program of God for His moral creatures is a comprehensive and illuminating approach to the tremendous mass of Scriptures which bear upon the divine purpose of God. An alternative to this is provided by a second approach, that of the so-called covenant theologians. It is not our purpose to deal in detail with this point of view, but its principal elements can be stated. It is the assumption of the covenant theologian that the major purpose of God is the salvation of the elect, embodied in a covenant of grace or covenant of redemption, and that all other purposes of God are subordinate to this. For this reason the divine revelation as it relates to angels is usually ignored as somewhat irrelevant. The contrast between God's program for Israel and the church is usually replaced by the concept that the church is a continuation of true Israel or that the church embraces all the saved of all ages.

At least two major objections can be mentioned opposing the covenant theologians' interpretation. First, the covenant theologian is guilty of the reductive error, namely, taking one facet of God's divine program

and making it all-determinative. It leaves without adequate explanation the dealings of God with the natural world, and with the mass of unsaved humanity, which is regarded simply as an unfortunate context for God's major purpose. Second, the interpretation of Scripture required for covenant theology involves passing over the specifics of hundreds of prophecies in Scripture and taking these either in a spiritualized sense or ignoring them altogether.

Preferable is the point of view that regards God's major purpose in the universe as that of self-manifestation. In this approach the summum bonum is the manifestation of the infinite perfections of God which constitute His glory. With this point of view, the natural world takes on wonderful meaning in that "the heavens declare the glory of God." The salvation of the elect in all dispensations is recognized as a major aspect of manifesting His glory, for in this alone can His infinite love and righteousness merge in grace, but other aspects of the divine program are not displaced. The separate programs of God for the angels, Gentiles, Israel, and the church each bring out different facets of God's infinite perfection such as righteousness in relation to the angels, faithfulness in relation to Israel, sovereignty in relation to the Gentiles, and grace and truth in relation to the church. Even the condemnation of the lost, pre-eminently demonstrating God's infinite righteousness and holiness, is seen in the context of divine love in that their hopeless estate was needless because Christ has died for them.

#### Principle Of Interpretation

In the broad approach of interpretation of prophecy attention needs to be given to two alternative principles of interpretation. That adopted in this study is the principle that Scripture should be interpreted in its normative, literal sense, except in such instances where a figurative or nonliteral interpretation is obviously indicated. In applying this principle no distinction needs to be observed between Scripture which is noneschatological and Scripture which is eschatological. The same hermeneutical principles which apply to any other portion of Scripture apply equally well to eschatology.

An alternative point of view was advanced by Augustine who suggested a dual hermeneutics, namely, that while all Scripture should be interpreted normally--that is, literally--prophecy or eschatology was to be understood in a figurative or nonliteral way. His principal reason for this dual hermeneutics was that a literal interpretation of prophecy would lead to chiliasm, or the premillennial interpretation. Modern amillenarians have not improved much on Augustine's original dismissal of premillennialism. Their principal objection continues to be that the premillennial system is hopelessly confused and self-contradictory. The answer to this objection, while having many facets, is in the main a demonstration that premillennial interpretation is not only consistent with Scripture but consistent with itself and provides a program for eschatology which is not afforded in any other point of view.

It will be impossible within the confines of this study to debate in any satisfactory way the question of premillennialism versus amillennialism. This has been presented many times by competent scholars. Such works as J. Dwight Pentecost's *Things to Come*; Charles Feinberg's *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?*; Alva J. McClain's *The Greatness of the Kingdom*; Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology*; *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* by Charles Ryrie; and my own volume, *The Millennial Kingdom*, set forth a sufficient answer for those who are willing to examine their pages.

The purpose of this study will be to examine Biblical prophecies relating to Israel and the theological implications arising from such an interpretation. The approach would be basically Scriptural and the reasonableness of the interpretation its own major defense. The best answer to the charge that there is no

distinction between Israel and the church and similar amillennial dictums is to present what the Scriptures actually reveal. Fundamental to this whole point of view is the exegesis and interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant.

### Exegesis Of The Abrahamic Covenant

The first statement of the covenant of God made with Abraham, given in Genesis 12:1-3, was originally delivered to Abraham while still in Ur of the Chaldees and is stated in these words: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." God promised Abraham that subject to his obedience to the command to leave his own country and go to a land that God would show him, certain blessings would accrue to him.

First, certain promises were given to Abraham personally. Of Abraham, God would make a great nation. His divine blessing would rest upon Abraham. His name would be great. Abraham himself would be a blessing. In regard to Abraham, God promised a special circumstance in which He would bless those who blessed Abraham and would curse those who cursed him. The blessing promised through Abraham, according to verse three, was to extend to all families of the earth.

Second, though the Abrahamic covenant as given was directed primarily to Abraham as a person, it is obvious that out of it come two other major aspects of the covenant. Not only did God direct promises to Abraham himself, but the promise was given of the formation of a great nation out of Abraham. Third, the blessings falling on Abraham and his descendants would reach out unto all other families of the earth. Hence, an ordinary exegesis of the Abrahamic covenant in its original pronouncement involves (1) promises to Abraham; (2) promises to the nation, i.e., Israel; (3) promise of blessing to all nations, i.e., the Gentiles.

The prophecy of this Scripture is enriched by further revelation given later. In Genesis 12:7 God declared to Abraham: "Unto thy seed will I give this land." The promise of the land is reiterated in Genesis 13:14-17 where Abraham is exhorted to survey the land in all directions. In addition, Abraham's seed, destined to occupy the land, is described as being as numerous as the dust of the earth.

The dimensions of the land promised to the seed of Abraham are recorded in Genesis 15:18-20. The entire area from the river of Egypt unto the Euphrates river is given to Abraham and his posterity as a perpetual possession. Further details are given concerning the promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-8, including the fact that he would have a multitude of seed, and would be the father of many nations. In recognition of this his name is changed from Abram, meaning "exalted father," to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." It is further promised that he would be exceedingly fruitful (17:6) and that kings would descend from him. The covenant with Abraham is declared in verse seven to be everlasting and the promise of possession of the land forever is reiterated in verse eight. The Abrahamic covenant is subject to further elucidation in Genesis 22:15-18 after Abraham's seed is limited to Abraham's son Isaac in Genesis 21:12, in the words: "For in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Taking into consideration the fact that Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, the promise is further limited to Jacob and his descendants in Genesis 28:13, 14 in the revelation: "I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed: and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in

thee, and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

These many Scriptures dealing with the Abrahamic covenant will be discussed more at length later, but their mere itemization establishes the basic promises embodied in the Abrahamic covenant which can now be summarized as follows: (1) Abraham's name shall be great. (2) Abraham shall personally have great blessing. (3) Whoever will bless Abraham will be blessed and whoever will curse Abraham will be cursed. (4) From Abraham will come a great nation, innumerable as the dust of the earth. (5) Abraham will be the father of many nations, not just one. (6) Kings shall come from the line of Abraham. (7) Abraham's seed shall inherit the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates river as an everlasting possession. (8) God will be the God of Abraham and his seed forever. (9) Abraham's seed shall conquer their enemies. (10) In Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. (11) The covenant with Abraham shall be an everlasting covenant. (12) The promises to Abraham's seed are narrowed to the descendants of Isaac. (13) The promises to Abraham's seed are narrowed to descendants of Jacob, especially as pertaining to the land and the promise of blessing to all nations.

In arriving at these details, the plain language of Scripture and the promises of the Abrahamic covenant have simply been itemized. If the facts stand as they seem to be presented in the Scriptures, a massive presentation of the divine purpose of God for Abraham's seed is thus unfolded. It is a dramatic declaration of a new divine purpose quite different from His declared purpose for Gentiles as a whole. A particular rill of humanity has been sovereignly chosen to fulfill a divine purpose distinct in its character and in its fulfillment.

It is obvious, however, to any interpreter of Scripture that all will not agree on such a literal interpretation of these promises and it is therefore necessary to give attention not only to the exegesis but to the interpretation of the words and statements embodied in the Abrahamic covenant and its subsequent enlargement and repetition. Two major considerations confront the interpreter of the Abrahamic covenant: (1) Are these promises to be taken simply and literally, or are they to be interpreted in a non-literal or figurative sense? (2) Are the promises embodied in the Abrahamic covenant sovereignly given or are they contingent upon subsequent obedience on the part of Abraham and his seed? In brief, the issue is literal versus spiritualized interpretation, and the question of whether the covenant is conditional or unconditional.

#### Are The Promises To Abraham Literal?

In approaching the interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant, one is faced with a determinative decision which goes far beyond the borders of specific promises of this covenant. The issue in a word is whether prophecy can be interpreted literally and normally or whether it should be understood in a figurative or spiritualized sense. The amillennial point of view requires extensive spiritualization of prophecy, whereas the premillennial interpretation is more literal. As related to the Abrahamic covenant, the question hinges on the interpretation of the expression, "the seed of Abraham," and the specifics that are promised. The problem has been somewhat confused by the fact that some premillenarians have tended to build their system upon an amillennial foundation and have not kept clearly in mind a proper basis for premillennial truth. In general, however, the premillennial point of view requires that the promises given to Abraham should be fulfilled by Abraham. Promises to Abraham's seed shall be fulfilled by his physical descendants, and promises made to "all families of the earth" will be fulfilled by Gentiles, i.e., those who are not physical descendants of Abraham. Hence, extreme care should be taken in determining precisely what promises are given to what peoples.

Guided by this principle, one can observe certain promises true only of Abraham, i.e., God's personal blessing upon him, the promise that his name shall be great, and that God will make a great nation of him. The promise given to all nations is limited to the idea that they shall be blessed through Abraham. This of course is subsequently enlarged in God's total program in grace for believing Gentiles in general and the church in particular. The crux of the interpretative problem, however, lies in the definition of the expression, "the seed of Abraham." How shall this expression be understood?

An examination of all references to the seed of Abraham in Scripture reveals that the expression is used in three distinct senses. First, there is the natural use, i.e., the natural seed of Abraham referring to those who are actual physical descendants of Abraham. Though there is a sense in which all natural descendants of Abraham are included, such as Ishmael and his descendants and Isaac and his descendants through Esau, it is clear that the particular promises of God to the seed are narrowed first to Isaac and then to Jacob and through Jacob to the twelve tribes of Israel. To them God promises in a special sense to be their God. To them was given the law of Moses, and the perpetual title to the Promised Land is given to them.

Second, the expression "the seed of Abraham" is used in special reference to the spiritual lineage coming from Abraham, that is, those in Israel who trusted in God, who kept the law, and qualified for many of the blessings of the covenant. It is evident, for instance, that all Israelites do not actually inherit the land and that only spiritual Israel will enter the future millennial kingdom and fulfill the promise. The distinction between natural Israel and spiritual Israel is revealed in such major passages as Romans 9-11 and specifically in Romans 9:6-8: "For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel: neither because they are Abraham's seed are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed." It is evident then that the more particular promises of the Abrahamic covenant will not be fulfilled by all the natural seed, but by those in natural Israel who also qualify as spiritual seed. Further, the provision of divine sovereignty is that God apart from human merit determines the selection of Jacob instead of Esau (Romans 9:12, 13). In order to qualify, therefore, for the full promise of God to Israel, an individual had to be, first, of the natural seed of Abraham, i.e., a descendant of Jacob, and, second, one who trusted in God, thereby qualifying as belonging to the spiritual seed.

A third division, however, relating to the spiritual seed of Abraham is unfolded in Galatians 3:6-9 which reads as follows: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed. So then they that are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham." Here we learn that there is also a spiritual seed of Abraham who are Gentiles, those who are not physical descendants of Abraham. Some, on the basis of this Galatians passage, have drawn the unwarranted conclusion that all distinctions between the natural seed of Abraham and the spiritual seed are thereby erased.

The passage itself, however, makes very clear that Gentiles who are recognized as the children of Abraham come under the promise given to the Gentiles and not under promises given to the physical seed of Abraham. The portion of the Abrahamic covenant which is quoted by Paul refers to the Gentiles in the words: "In thee shall all the nations be blessed." Paul's conclusion therefore is: "So then they that are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham." This means that they come under the blessing promised the nations, but it does not mean that they come under all the promises given to Abraham personally or to his seed in the physical sense. A Gentile in the present age is Abraham's seed because he is "in Christ

Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). It is on this basis that Galatians 3:29 states: "And if you are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise."

A Gentile Christian therefore becomes the seed of Abraham not because of any physical lineage with Abraham himself nor simply by imitation of Abraham's faith, but because he is regarded by God as in Christ who is indeed a physical descendant of Abraham. The promises thereby assured are the promises given to Gentiles, not the particular promises given to Israel.

It may be concluded, therefore, that the seed of Abraham is used (1) of the natural seed of Abraham, more specifically the descendants of Jacob; (2) spiritual Israel, i.e., descendants of Jacob who trust in God; (3) Gentiles who are in Christ and are spiritual seed of Abraham, thereby qualifying for the promise of blessing to Gentiles in Abraham. Promises addressed to Abraham, therefore, can be apportioned according to the qualifying characteristic of each group. The promise given to Abraham that God would bless those who bless him, and curse those who curse him, has to some extent been extended to the entire nation of Israel, even to those who do not qualify as spiritual seed. History has demonstrated God's faithfulness in dealing with those who have oppressed His ancient people.

The realization of most of the promises, however, depends upon an individual Israelite being spiritual. Only thus will he ever enter into the future millennial kingdom, either as a survivor of the tribulation or as a resurrected saint. The blessings of God to Israel in this life as recorded in the Old Testament have been largely limited to spiritual Israel. Upon natural Israel in unbelief God has heaped His judgment and divine discipline. The promise to the spiritual seed of Abraham among the Gentiles is having a supreme demonstration in this present age in the calling out of the church composed largely of those who in their natural estate were Gentiles. The threefold distinction, therefore, in the seed of Abraham provides a solid basis for understanding eschatology as a whole while maintaining the proper distinction between Israel and the church and between Abraham's physical seed and Gentiles.

The principal opposition to this threefold distinction in the usage of the term "the seed of Abraham" arises from the amillennial interpretation and more particularly from those who embrace covenant theology. Illustrative of this amillennial point of view is the work, *The Seed of Abraham*, by Albertus Pieters. To him the term "the seed of Abraham" means only the spiritual seed of Abraham without distinction between Israel and Gentiles or between natural and spiritual. Pieters summarizes his point of view in these words: "The expression 'Seed of Abraham,' in biblical usage, denotes that visible community, the members of which stand in relation to God through the Abrahamic Covenant, and thus are heirs to the Abrahamic promise" (p. 20). He states further: "Whenever we meet with the argument that God made certain promises to the Jewish race, the above facts are pertinent. God never made any promises to any race at all, as a race. All His promises were to the continuing covenanted community, without regard to its racial constituents or to the personal ancestry of the individuals in it" (pp. 19, 20). He holds further that not only are the promises given only to the spiritual seed, but that the modern Jew of today has lost his lineage and there is no one qualified to inherit any promises given to the Jews as a race.

While it is not the intent here to provide a complete refutation of the amillennial exegesis of the Abrahamic covenant, certain important objections can be raised. First, the argument of Pieters rests on the assumption that there is no one today who is a physical descendant of Abraham. This extreme position is not shared by most amillenarians as it is faced by almost insuperable problems. The racial continuity of Israel, though marred by intermarriage with heathen, is recognized throughout the Scriptures. As late as the epistle of James, the twelve tribes are addressed (James 1:1). The Jews have been recognized by the

world as a continuing people as manifested in the Zionist movement, the existence of the state of Israel today, the perpetuation of Israel's religion, and by almost universal recognition that the people of Israel are a distinct race. If the testimony of the book of Revelation may be introduced as evidence, one finds here again the twelve tribes of Israel specified by name as participating in the future great tribulation.

A notable weakness in the amillennial exegesis of the Abrahamic covenant is the fact that it does not take into consideration the specifics of God's revelation. Pieters for instance passes over Genesis 15:18-21 without even a word of comment, and the revelation that the covenant is everlasting and that the land is promised as an everlasting possession in Genesis 17:7, 8 is likewise given silent treatment. The fact is that any reasonable understanding of the terminology of these passages leads unmistakably to the conclusion that Abraham understood the promises as given to his physical seed, which forms the background of his special interest in Isaac and the promise of the land which evidently Abraham understood in a physical way. It is true that Abraham's faith went beyond the promise of the physical land to that of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem in the eternal state, as indicated in Hebrews 11:10. But the promise of the land is obviously related to the temporal and will be fulfilled as long as the present earth lasts, whereas the promise of the eternal city had to do with the eternal state.

A spiritualized understanding of the promises of the land becomes ridiculous in that the land has to be made to mean heaven. The description given of the land in Genesis 15:15-18 as extending from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates and including godless and pagan tribes is hardly a suitable terminology for the description of heaven. The efforts to understand the Abrahamic covenant in a specialized interpretation ultimately destroys any exegesis of these passages and changes the intended revelation to the point where the words used no longer have proper meaning. Premillenarians agree that there is a spiritual seed of Abraham, and that these inherit the appropriate promises addressed to spiritual Israel or spiritual Gentiles as the case may be. They deny that this requires spiritualization of the promises as pertaining to the physical seed of Abraham and the promises relating to the land. Further attention will be given these features later.

#### Are The Promises To Abraham Conditional?

The traditional amillennial interpretation of the Abrahamic promises tends to follow the method of spiritualizing them, thereby removing the element of specific and literal predictions. Another device, however, adopted by modern amillenarians, follows the argument that the promises are conditional. Under this approach a literal interpretation of the promise can be followed, i.e., it may be held that Israel was actually promised the land and other blessings, but it is charged that Israel failed to meet the conditions. Therefore the promises are withdrawn. Such is the approach of Oswald Allis in his book, *Prophecy and the Church*.

Allis states his support of the conditional element in the Abrahamic covenant in these words: "It is true that, in the express terms of the covenant with Abraham, obedience is not stated as a condition. But that obedience was presupposed is clearly indicated by two facts. The one is that obedience is the precondition of blessing under all circumstances...The second fact is that in the case of Abraham the duty of obedience is particularly stressed" (p. 33).

It is true that, in some cases in the Bible, promises are given in a conditional way. For instance, the Mosaic covenant contains many conditional promises, i.e., blessing for obedience, cursing or divine judgment for disobedience. However, it is not true that in Scripture obedience is always the condition of blessing. Allis,

who is a Calvinist, has forgotten his doctrine of unconditional election. He has also forgotten the principle of divine grace in which God blesses those who are unworthy. The fact is that many of God's blessings fall upon those who are the least worthy of them. In such a doctrine as the security of the believer, which Allis would be the first to support, there is recognition of the principle that God makes promises which depend on Himself and His grace, not on human faithfulness. It certainly is not true that God's promises or that prophecy as a whole is conditioned upon human action. The major premise of Allis therefore, that obedience is always the condition of blessing, is a fallacy. God is able to make promises and keep them regardless of what men may do.

The second aspect of the position of Allis, that in the case of Abraham the duty of obedience is particularly stressed, is true in itself, but it does not affect the argument. In several instances in Abraham's life he was disobedient and in none of these instances did God withdraw the promise of the covenant. On other occasions when Abraham was obedient God reiterated the promise and added further details. But never was the promise made contingent upon later obedience. As a matter of fact, the history of Israel abounds in records of their disobedience, and yet the covenant of God given through Abraham is repeated in various ways and confirmed throughout the entire Old Testament.

There is, however, a partial validity to the point of view of Allis, namely, that under the covenant an individual Israelite would qualify for personal blessings by obedience which he would not receive if he were disobedient. For instance, when Israel was obedient they were blessed in the land. When they were disobedient they were removed and taken away into captivity. The ultimate fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham, however, was never in jeopardy as even in the midst of their apostasy they were given strongest assurances of being brought back into the land in subsequent generations and of their continuance as a nation.

Amillenarians are wont to bring up numerous problems, such as the conditional judgment pronounced upon Ninevah by Jonah, the judgment upon Eli's house, and limitation and application of blessings of the Abrahamic covenant to the spiritual scene. These have been answered in detail by premillenarians (cf. *The Millennial Kingdom* by the writer, pp. 154 ff). In a word, conditional promises under the Mosaic covenant do not affect the Abrahamic covenant. There is a proper answer to every amillennial objection, and the support of the concept that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional is abundant.

The evidence that the covenant with Abraham is unconditional should be understood as supporting the idea that the complete fulfillment of the covenant was rendered sure when God gave it to Abraham in the first place. By using the word unconditional, it is not intended to imply that there were no human contingencies, but rather that God took all these contingencies into consideration when He made the promise. Further, it should be understood that the promise is not necessarily in all of its aspects fulfilled to every individual Israelite, but that some aspects of the promise are reserved for particular Israelites in a particular generation and limited to a large extent to those in Israel who are qualified as the spiritual seed of Abraham. The promise is not necessarily fulfilled therefore by all the seed of Abraham, but by some of the seed of Abraham.

The unconditional aspect of the Abrahamic covenant is confirmed by the fact that all of Israel's covenants are unconditional except the Mosaic. In the statement of the covenant itself no conditions are itemized. When confirmations are given, while these sometimes arise from some act of obedience or devotion, it is not implied thereby that the covenant itself is conditioned. Further, the covenant with Abraham was confirmed by the unqualified oath of God symbolized in the shedding of blood and passing between parts

of the sacrifice as described in Genesis 15:7-21. While circumcision was required to recognize an individual as being within the covenant, it is not made the sine qua non of the fulfillment of the covenant. In fact, the Abrahamic covenant was given before the rite of circumcision was introduced. Not only was the covenant confirmed without conditions to Isaac and Jacob, but later it was reiterated to the people of Israel in times of disobedience and apostasy, the most notable case being that of Jeremiah, when the nation was promised that it would continue forever (Jeremiah 31:36). The New Testament declares the Abrahamic covenant immutable (Hebrews 6:13-18). A study of later covenants tends to support the unconditional character of the Abrahamic. The idea therefore that the Abrahamic covenant is suspended and inoperative because of sin in the lives of descendants of Abraham is untenable. If a literal interpretation of the promises is allowed, literal fulfillment can be expected.

## Summary

The prophetic program of God for Israel is therefore one of the four major programs revealed in the Bible: (1) The program of God for angels. (2) The program of God for Gentiles. (3) The program of God for the church. (4) The program of God for Israel. This approach is far superior to that of the covenant theologians as it comprehends all events of all classifications and relates them to the total divine program in which God manifests His own infinite perfections to His own glory. It further permits a normal and literal interpretation of prophecy in the same way as is used in interpreting other forms of Scriptural revelation.

The Abrahamic covenant contributes to the eschatology of Israel by detailing the broad program of God as it affects Abraham's seed. It includes promises to Abraham personally, promises to the nation as such, and promises of blessing through Israel to the Gentiles. Important in the Abrahamic covenant is the promise as directed to the seed which is limited in subsequent Scripture to Isaac, and then Jacob, and then the twelve sons of Jacob. The question of whether the promises to Abraham should be interpreted literally was shown to hinge on the question of literal interpretation of the expression "the seed of Abraham." It was shown that this expression has a threefold use in the Bible--first, to the natural seed of Abraham, that is, all of his physical descendants; second, to the seed of Abraham who followed Abraham's noble example of faith, i.e., the Israel who trusted in God; and, third, the spiritual seed of Abraham, that is, Gentiles who qualify for the promise given to the nations. Evidence was adduced that the promises given to Abraham's physical seed will be fulfilled in his literal descendants who qualify spiritually, whereas promises given to the spiritual seed who are not physical descendants of Abraham inherit the promises given to Gentiles. This approach allowed a normal and literal interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant. The second leading question, namely, are the promises given to Abraham conditional? was answered by pointing to Scriptures that affirm the unalterable purpose of God that Israel should be a nation forever and should possess the land forever. Amillennial arguments to the contrary were considered and found without adequate basis. It is not too much to say that the exegesis of the Abrahamic covenant and its resulting interpretation is the foundation for the study of prophecy as a whole, not only as relating to Israel, but also for the Gentiles and the church. It is here that the true basis for a premillennial interpretation of the Scriptures is found.

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