

ISRAEL, OUR SPIRITUAL HOME

I was invited to be a guest speaker for a fall brunch held at a church in a neighboring state. After being welcomed by my hostess I joined a group of five other ladies at a round table beautifully decorated with various, colorful fall mums.

Introductions were made all around as the brunch was being served. My hostess mentioned to the ladies that I have often traveled to Israel. The woman to my left had a puzzled look. She asked, “After you go once, why go back to the same place?” My answer came easily, “It is our spiritual home. It is Covenant Land and people full of promise.”

Her response to me echoed that of too many Christians, “But that was Old Testament. And because the Jews rejected Jesus isn’t He finished with them and the land?” Is He?

To answer her question, I needed to go back to the beginning — Genesis.

In Ur of the Chaldeans (southern Iraq) lived a God-fearing 75 year old man — a very successful herdsman, named Abram. He lived with his extended family and his wife Sarai, who was barren and long past child—bearing years.

One day God came to Abram (Genesis 12) and said to him “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God even told him that his descendants would be ‘as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore.’ He further told Abram to “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants **forever.**” (Genesis 13:14, 15)

It meant that Abram must take God at His literal word. He must leave the land of his birth, uproot and lead his large family, servants and vast herds for an unknown land and for a promise of descendants from a *barren* woman!

ABRAHAMIC COVENANT: AN EVERLASTING, UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT

Wanting to confirm what he had heard (Can we blame him?) Abram asked God for a sign to assure him of the promise. “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” God graciously answered him by a familiar rite called *Covenant* where two parties were bound together in an agreement for life.

To mark the Covenant, animals were cut in half and laid out with a pathway through which the two parties would pass, side by side, each carrying a torch. They were both pledging with their lives to keep

their part of the agreement: Abram understood that the living God was inviting him into this contractual agreement.

Scripture tells us that when it came time to make the walk, God put Abram into a deep sleep and He alone passed through. God was making clear that honoring the Covenant relationship would never depend on Abram and his descendants keeping their part of the agreement. It was God alone who would forever be faithful to honor the Covenant and the promises He made for a particular land and people. *It would confirm to Abram that God's promise was literal, eternal, and unconditional.*

God marked the moment by changing Abram's name to Abraham, declaring that he was now made a father of many nations.

THE CONDITIONAL COVENANT MADE WITH MOSES

430 years later God made another Covenant with Moses and the Hebrew people. However, this Covenant was *conditional*. The Hebrew people would experience the blessings of God as long as they remained obedient to Him. "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My Covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people, for all the earth is Mine." (Exodus 19:5)

Along with the promise of blessing in this second Covenant came a warning about the consequences of disobedience. "Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other." (Deuteronomy 28:64).

We know the history of the Hebrew people. Even though Israel broke that second, conditional Covenant with God by their disobedience and experienced the punishment promised, God said He would always honor His everlasting, unconditional Covenant with Abraham and be faithful to keep promises made thousands of years ago!

"Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking My Covenant with them. I am the LORD their God." (Leviticus 26:44—45) God's commitment to the Jews and the land is eternal, too.

Today, too many people believe that because the Jews rejected Jesus they forfeited all of the promises that God made to them as descendants of Abraham. They believe Jews are disinherited in favor of the Church.

Did God, who is outside of time, not see that two thousand years after making Covenant with Abraham, Jewish leaders would reject their Messiah? What about the early church being birthed by Jewish believers and their faithfulness? Did God understand that *no* people could remain faithful to fulfilling their part of the Covenant? Is that why He put Abram to sleep?

I really did not have time to go into much depth with the young woman seated next to me at brunch. I prayed that I was one step on her path to seeking truth of God's everlasting, irrevocable Covenant made with Abraham for his descendants and the land of Israel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it important for us as Christians to believe that God’s promise to Abraham is still valid? Why, or why not?

2. What does Jeremiah 31:35—37 say about Israel and the Jewish people today?

3. How important is it that we treat the Abrahamic Covenant as a literal promise?

4. The Word of God says that Abraham believed God and it was credited (considered) for righteousness. Genesis 15:6 What were the different faith challenges that Abraham faced when God spoke to him in Genesis?

5. What does the Abrahamic Covenant say about the character and nature of God?

6. Can you think of a time where God was asking you to stretch your faith to trust Him to step into a place that was unknown?

7. Match the Covenant with it’s definition:

___ Abrahamic Covenant	a. Based in the finished work of Christ
___ The New Covenant (<i>not mentioned in this teaching</i>)	b. Unconditional, everlasting even to today
___ Moses Covenant	c. Conditional, if broken, punishment resulted