

A Cut Above or Cut Off?

Conditionality of the Covenant of Circumcision

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Introduction

This paper traces the Covenant of Circumcision from the time when it was originally given to Abraham, down through the Law, and into the New Testament period. Various contemporary interpretations are also considered.

Purpose Statement

The Covenant of Circumcision¹ is at the head of the contemporary clash between Covenantal and Dispensational theological systems. Theologians on both sides of the issue have drawn clear lines are drawn in the sand.

Dispensational theologians claim that the covenant God made with Abraham was unconditional and eternal². They will often acknowledge that individual participation in the covenant requires obedience, but deny that corporate obedience is required.

In contrast, Covenantal theologians assert that the covenant was conditional³. They say that Abraham and his descendents have to be obedient to God.

Careful examination of the various Biblical texts on the promises made to God and the conditions attached to those promises are the key to the solution. It is the contention of the author that tracing of the texts through their historical development and their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, provides a strong case for a conditional covenant.

¹ The phrase “The Covenant of Circumcision” is functionally equivalent to the phrase “The Abrahamic Covenant”. The phrase is from Acts 7:8; “And he gave him the *covenant of circumcision*: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.”

² Holdridge, Ron. *Is the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis Conditional or Unconditional?* p. 1. “... this covenant will be unconditionally fulfilled in its entirety”.

³ Allis, Oswald T., *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 34. An Amillennialist, Allis deals extensively with this subject.

Theological Aspects of the Covenant of Circumcision

Old Testament Theological Aspects

Promises to Abraham

God made a number of specific promises to Abraham⁴. These promises fall into four broad categories; land, descendants, social, and spiritual.

Land Promises

God promised Abraham⁵ and his descendants⁶ the land of Canaan⁷.

Promises of Descendants

This encompasses several different promises. The quantity of descendants, an heir, and a provision for Ishmael are promised.

A Large Quantity of Descendants

Several expressions are used to describe the number of descendants that Abraham would produce. God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as many as the stars of the sky⁸. His descendants are also described as being numerous as the dust of the earth⁹. The number of descendants is also described as being promised to be as many as the sands of the sea¹⁰.

⁴ The first promise came when Abraham was 75 years old. (Gen 12:4). The promises came over a period of about 25 years.

⁵ Gen 13:14-15 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.

Gen 15:7 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.

⁶ Gen 15:18-21 Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

⁷ Gen 24:7 The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

⁸ Gen 15:5 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.

⁹ Gen 13:16 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

¹⁰ Gen 22:17 That in blessing I will bless thee ... and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.

An Heir

Abraham's wife that was barren¹¹ and past the age of producing children¹². God promised Abraham an heir from his own seed¹³ and that Sarah would be the one to bear that child¹⁴. Abraham tried to accomplish that by taking Hagar as his wife and producing Ishmael¹⁵. However, God made it clear that Ishmael was not to be the heir. A great nation (singular) was promised to come out of Abraham¹⁶.

Specific Provision for Ishmael

Since Ishmael was not to be the heir of the promise¹⁷, Abraham was concerned that he not be disinherited. God promised Abraham that He would make a nation from Ishmael¹⁸.

Social Promises

God promised to make Abraham famous¹⁹ and that he would be a blessing to the world²⁰. Abraham was promised that he would be the object of God's watchful care and be protected from his enemies²¹ and his descendents would possess the gates of their enemies²².

Spiritual Promises

The primary promise was that the God of the universe would be Abraham's [personal] God²³. God promised guidance to Abraham²⁴. God promised Abraham that he would bless Him²⁵. The faith that Abraham had in the promise of God rendered him righteous²⁶.

¹¹ Gen 11:30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

¹² Gen 18:11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

¹³ Gen 15:4 he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

¹⁴ Gen 18:10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son.

And, Gen 18:14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

¹⁵ Gen 16:15 And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael.

¹⁶ Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation,

And, Gen 18:18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation.

¹⁷ Gen 21:12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

¹⁸ Gen 21:13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

And., Gen 21:18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

¹⁹ Gen 12:2 I will make thy name great.

²⁰ Gen 12:2 I Thou shalt be a blessing: And, Gen 12:3 In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

And, Gen 18:18 ... all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him...

And, Gen 22:18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

²¹ Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.

²² Gen 22:17 ... thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies ...

²³ Gen 15:1 I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

²⁴ Gen 12:1 A land that I will show thee:

²⁵ Gen 12:2 I will bless thee.

Conditions of the Promises

There are a number of conditions on the promises that God gave Abraham. They are outlined in the following sections. Abraham performed some of these conditions and others were to have been performed by his descendents.

Land Promises

To inherit the land Abraham had to leave his fathers house and travel to a foreign land²⁷. In spite of the promise to inherit the land, during his lifetime Abraham lived as a sojourner in the land²⁸. Also, Abraham had to leave the land and go to Egypt when there was a famine in the land²⁹. This was later to be repeated³⁰ with Joseph and then with the other sons of Israel³¹.

Promises of Descendents

Procreation with Sarah

Obviously a condition of inheriting the promise of descendents through Sarah³² is that Abraham actually had to have sexual relations with Sarah³³. When Abraham received the initial promise he took Hagar³⁴ and tried to bring it about in a natural manner. This was not God's intended plan.

And, Gen 22:17 That in blessing I will bless thee,

²⁶ Gen 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

²⁷ Gen 12:1 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 show thee:

²⁸ Gen 23:4 I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

²⁹ Gen 12:10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

³⁰ Gen 46:6 And they took their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob, and all his seed with him:

³¹ Gen 42:1 Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another?

³² Gen 17:16 And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

³³ Explanation of the reasons for this are beyond the scope of this paper ☺

³⁴ Gen 16:3-4 And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived:

Obedience in Instructing his Children

God stated a condition of the continuation of the promises, i. e., that Abraham would be faithful to teach his children to keep the way of God and to do justice³⁵. It has been argued that this was prophetic due to the phrase “For I know him, that he will”, but if Abraham had not performed the act, it’s apparent from the text that he would not have received the blessing. The requirement by Israel that his sons bring his bones out of Israel was evidence that Jacob continued the required instruction of his children³⁶.

Sacrifice of Isaac as an Act of Obedience

God commanded Abraham to do a specific act by commanding him to take his son to be sacrificed³⁷. Abraham was obedient to God in this act. Because he was obedient, God blessed him³⁸.

Circumcision as a Condition

Circumcision is a religious ritual that involves the removal of the foreskin of the male sex organ. Circumcision, as ordained by God to Abraham³⁹, was to be performed on all male children⁴⁰ on the eighth day after birth⁴¹. In the case of servants, they were to be circumcised when they were brought into the household. This was a requirement⁴² with the penalty being that anyone who was not circumcised was cut off from the covenant⁴³.

Circumcision is an unusual sacrifice in that the parents are the ones who circumcise their children. However, God holds the parent responsible if he does not circumcise his child⁴⁴.

³⁵ Gen 18:19 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.

³⁶ Gen 49:29-30 And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying place.

³⁷ Gen 22:2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

³⁸ Gen 22:16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

And, Gen 22:18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

³⁹ Gen 17:9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

⁴⁰ Gen 17:10 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.

⁴¹ Gen 17:12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.

⁴² Gen 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

⁴³ Gen 17:14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

⁴⁴ Exo 4:24-16 And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely

If a child was not circumcised, he could later be circumcised when he reached the age to consent. This requirement prevented male converts from becoming Jews in many cases.

Perhaps the most difficult question is: “Why perform circumcision at all?” Circumcision causes physical pain in one’s son. It physically hurts the son and it emotionally causes the father pain. Circumcision leaves a physical mark that remains with a person forever. Even if the father designates someone else to actually perform the act, he knows that the son is feeling pain due to his permitting it to happen. However, the father knows that the pain will be over and that the benefits of the covenant outweigh the costs. This pain will last for several days but being part of the covenant God made with Abraham will last all of that person’s life.

In the Old Testament, circumcision was to be a spiritual matter⁴⁵. The heart was to be circumcised⁴⁶. This is repeated in several places in the Old Testament⁴⁷.

Circumcision of Abraham and Ishmael (Gen 17)

This was the first recorded Biblical instance⁴⁸ of circumcision and the institution of the covenant of circumcision between God and Abraham.

The requirement that all of Abraham’s descendents must be circumcised on the eighth day was also revealed at this time⁴⁹.

Abraham was 99 years old when he circumcised himself and the same day he circumcised Ishmael and his servants. Ishmael was thirteen when he was circumcised. Interestingly, Ishmael is excluded from the covenant⁵⁰, but was still circumcised as part of the household of Abraham⁵¹.

a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.

⁴⁵ Deu 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

⁴⁶ Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

⁴⁷ Jer 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

⁴⁸ For an history of circumcision outside of the Biblical context, See: History of Circumcision <http://nocirc.org/symposia/second/larue.html>

⁴⁹ No particular explanation was given as to why the eighth day was chosen. Does it relate to the original seven days of creation, perhaps? Various Medical reasons have been suggested, See Missler, Chuck. *None of these Diseases*, for instance. These are generally disregarded by the medical community.

⁵⁰ Gen 17:21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

⁵¹ For the Moslem view of circumcision, see <http://sunnah.org/msaac/articles/circumci.htm>.

Circumcision of Isaac (Gen 21)

This is notable as the first circumcision to be performed on a newborn. Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day⁵². The use of the phrase “as God had *commanded* him” is the same Hebrew word that was used when God *commanded* man not to eat of the tree of life⁵³. This is further evidence that the covenant with Abraham was conditional, since this is a requirement to continue in the covenant.

Conditions on Social Promises

Although Abraham was given certain social promises they were no guarantee of freedom from difficulty in his relationship with his neighbors, for example, the incident with his Sarah and Pharaoh as well as his Sarah and Abimelech. In situations that would have led to the death of other men, God intervened in his behalf and Abraham ended up profiting in the end.

Spiritual Promises

The spiritual promise has always had both sides to it. God is the God of the people⁵⁴ who want Him to be their God⁵⁵.

Fulfillment of the Promises in the Time of the Old Testament

Genesis states that God blessed Abraham in all things in his lifetime⁵⁶.

Land Promises

God told Abraham that his descendents would be out of the land for 400 years in Egypt⁵⁷ and promised deliverance⁵⁸ at the end of that time with a return to the land⁵⁹. The life of

⁵² Gen 21:4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

⁵³ Gen 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

⁵⁴ Gen 17:7 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.

⁵⁵ The conditionality and effect of personal acceptance is seen in the statement of Gen 28:21 “So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God:” as well as statements like 1 Ki 18:21 “And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.”

⁵⁶ Gen 24:1 And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

⁵⁷ Gen 15:13 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;

⁵⁸ Gen 15:14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

⁵⁹ Gen 15:16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

Moses was the fulfillment of the promise of deliverance⁶⁰ from the 400 years of slavery. The land promise was reiterated through Moses⁶¹. After the exodus from Egypt and 40 additional years of wandering in the desert, the children of Israel eventually settled into the land. Thus, the covenant made with Abraham was transferred to the nation of the people of Israel⁶².

Old Testament Fulfillment of the Boundaries of the Land?

At issue is the question, “*Did the Jews in the Old Testament ever completely inhabit the land (up to the boundaries that were promised to Abraham), or is this a promise that will be fulfilled in the future?*” Several solutions to this question have been proposed.⁶³ As already noted the acknowledgement that God had blessed Abraham is made at the time of his death. The continued presence of the descendants of Abraham in the land is another fulfillment⁶⁴. In the entrance into Israel by Joshua⁶⁵, the children of Israel possessed the entire land⁶⁶ Moses had told them to possess⁶⁷. Under the reign of David and then Solomon, the land was extended greatly⁶⁸. However, the objection is raised against all of these that they did not possess the entire land promised to Abraham.

⁶⁰ Exo 18:8 And Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the LORD delivered them.

⁶¹ Deu 11:24 Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be.

⁶² 1 Chr 16:13-18 O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob, his chosen ones. 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 thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance;

⁶³ Worden, Skeets E. *Promise of the Land to Abraham in Genesis 17:8*, lists 7 fulfillment views of which 5 are in the Old Testament era. These are The time of Abraham, fulfilled by his descendants, fulfilled in the time of Joshua, fulfillment in the time of David and fulfillment in the time of Solomon The other two are fulfillment in the church and fulfillment in Christ.

⁶⁴ Gen 26:3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And, Gen 50:24 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

⁶⁵ Joshua 10 and Joshua 11 describe the extent of the land.

⁶⁶ Josh 11:23 So Joshua took the **whole land**, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

⁶⁷ Exo 13:5 And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month.

⁶⁸ 1 Ki 4:21 And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life.

Obedience as a Condition of the Old Testament Law

Clearly the descendants of Israel were intended to possess the land⁶⁹. Obedience is listed⁷⁰ in the law as a necessary condition to inherit and maintain the land promises in many places in the Law⁷¹. The Jews were not able to enter into the Promised Land due to disobedience⁷². Other solutions inside the Old Testament have been proposed. A warning is given to the children of Israel to not abandon God⁷³ along with a promise for obedience⁷⁴. The promises of the land are tied to obedience in the Law and can't be separated. Over and over again, Israel is taken captive into the other nations for disobedience to God's Law.

Promises of Descendants

An Heir

God gave Abraham a son through Sarah as was promised⁷⁵. God continued His covenant with Isaac and blessed him⁷⁶. Isaac became his immediate heir. Jacob inherited this promise as well⁷⁷. This same promise was repeated to David⁷⁸.

⁶⁹ Deu 1:8 Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.

⁷⁰ Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

⁷¹ Deu 8:1 All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers.

Deu 28:63 And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.

⁷² Num 32:11 Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me:

And,

Deu 1:35 Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swore to give unto your fathers,

⁷³ Deu 6:12 Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

⁷⁴ Deu 6:18 And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers,

⁷⁵ Gen 21:2-3 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

⁷⁶ Gen 25:11 And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac;

⁷⁷ Gen 28:15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

⁷⁸ 1 Ki 9:5 Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel.

And, Isa 9:7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

A Large Quantity of Descendents

The promise that his descendents would be like the number of the dust of the earth⁷⁹ and sands of the sea was repeated to Jacob⁸⁰. Seventy descendents of Jacob went with him into Egypt⁸¹. Six hundred thousand male descendents left Egypt in the Exodus⁸². The proliferation of the Israelites during their years of captivity⁸³ was part of the reason that they were made slaves in Egypt⁸⁴.

The threat was in the Law that if the people did not obey God, they would no longer be numerous as the stars of the heavens⁸⁵. This same condition was noted later in the Old Testament with only a remnant remaining due to disobedience⁸⁶.

This was clearly fulfilled in the people that left Egypt⁸⁷. There are other fulfillments as well. Solomon acknowledged that Israel was like the number of the dust of the earth⁸⁸. In a key passage, Jeremiah prophetically repeats the same promise from God⁸⁹. In Hosea the promise gets expanded to include a people that have not been previously named by God's name⁹⁰.

⁷⁹ Gen 28:14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth,

⁸⁰ Gen 32:12 And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

⁸¹ Gen 46:27 And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.

⁸² Exo 12:37 And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children.

⁸³ Exo 1:7 And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.

⁸⁴ North, Gary. *Moses & Pharaoh: Dominion Religion Versus Power Religion*, pp. 11-27 discusses the population growth of the Jews in Egypt at length in the chapter titled "Population Growth: A Tool of Dominion".

⁸⁵ Deu 28:62 And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God.

⁸⁶ Isa 10:22 For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

⁸⁷ Deu 1:10 The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.

And, Deu 10:22 Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude.

⁸⁸ 2 Chr 1:9 Now, O LORD God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude.

⁸⁹ Jer 33:22 As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.

And, Jer 33:25 Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; 26 Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.

⁹⁰ Hosea 1:10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

Specific Provision for Ishmael

Ishmael became the father of twelve princes with twelve nations⁹¹.

Social Promises

The promises to Abraham to bless those that treat him right and curse those who curse him are seen repeatedly in his life. In his dealings with Pharaoh and Abimelech⁹², God preserved the life of Moses and his posterity. The promise was repeated to the children of Israel when they entered the land that God would protect them⁹³, but the condition that they had to be faithful to God was stated along with the promise⁹⁴.

Spiritual Promises

Abraham found favor with God due to his faith. God answered Abraham's prayers⁹⁵. Yahweh was Abraham's God.

⁹¹ Gen 25:16 These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations.

⁹² Gen 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.

⁹³ Deu 11:25 There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you.

⁹⁴ Deu 11:26-28 Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.

⁹⁵ Gen 20:17 So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.

The New Covenant as Predicted in the Old Covenant

The Old Testament portrays a succession or progression of covenants. The original covenant was with Adam and Eve. It had as its requirement obedience to one commandment, not to eat of the tree⁹⁶. When Adam violated that covenant, God drove him from the garden and into the world⁹⁷.

When the wickedness of the world reached a low point, God destroyed the world with a flood⁹⁸ and made a covenant with Noah⁹⁹.

After some time, God made a covenant with Abraham¹⁰⁰. For the most part, this covenant was to be worked out in the nation of Israel¹⁰¹.

Additionally, The Old Testament has several passages where an additional new covenant was described¹⁰². This covenant was to supercede and replace the previous covenant¹⁰³ for the house of Israel¹⁰⁴. The new Covenant would have a representative who would be the focal point of the covenant¹⁰⁵.

The spiritual intent of the all of the previous covenants was to be the focal point of this new covenant¹⁰⁶. Obedience to God through love was the goal.

⁹⁶ Gen 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

⁹⁷ Gen 3:24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

⁹⁸ Gen 6:17 And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

⁹⁹ Gen 6:18 But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

¹⁰⁰ Gen 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:

¹⁰¹ Exo 2:24-25 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.

Exo 6:4-5 And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant.

¹⁰² For instance, Isa 49:8 Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

¹⁰³ Jer 31:31-32 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

¹⁰⁴ A key issue here is if the new covenant replaced the Mosaic covenant or the Abrahamic covenant.

¹⁰⁵ Deu 18:18-19 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

¹⁰⁶ Jer 31:33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

New Testament Theological Aspects

The New Covenant

The New Testament makes it clear that Christ¹⁰⁷ was the fulfillment of this prediction of a new covenant¹⁰⁸ and through Christ, His church. Christ inherits the Abrahamic Covenant as the successor to the covenant. Christ's priesthood being after the order of Melchizedek demonstrates this¹⁰⁹. The temporal promises of the law are replaced with the eternal promises of the new covenant¹¹⁰.

Fulfillments of the Promises to Abraham in the New Testament

Hebrews 11 states that the patriarchs did not receive the promises. They saw the promises far off, were persuaded of them, embraced them, and saw that the ultimate destiny was the kingdom of God not that of the earth¹¹¹. Their goal was the New Jerusalem¹¹², not the earthly¹¹³.

Land Promises

Christ inherits the entire earth as the fruit of His obedience¹¹⁴. The New Jerusalem is described as being 1600 miles square¹¹⁵ which more than covers the boundaries described in the covenant with Abraham.

The kingdom of heaven¹¹⁶ replaces the temporal land promises¹¹⁷. The promise to Abraham that he would possess the land to the north, south, east and west, is replaced

¹⁰⁷ Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant,

¹⁰⁸ Heb 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: ... Heb 9:15 And for this cause he [Christ] is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

¹⁰⁹ Heb 6:20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

¹¹⁰ Heb 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

¹¹¹ Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

¹¹² Heb 11:16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

And, Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

¹¹³ Heb 11:16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

¹¹⁴ Mat 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

¹¹⁵ Rev 21:16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

with the statement that people shall come from the north, south, east and west into the kingdom of God, but the Jews will be cast out¹¹⁸. The earthly descendents of Abraham only gain entrance to that kingdom through Christ¹¹⁹.

Promises of Descendents

An Heir

As was noted previously, David inherited the promise that was made to Abraham. Christ¹²⁰ is the legitimate heir¹²¹ to the throne of David¹²². The heir is expanded from Abraham's limited desire to have someone to inherit his possessions, to God's desire for the same thing¹²³.

A Large Quantity of Descendents

The New Testament makes it clear that the promise to have many descendents given to Abraham was fulfilled¹²⁴. However, Jesus made it clear that it was not natural descendancy that qualifies one to be a child of Abraham¹²⁵. This same theme is a major subject in Paul's writings¹²⁶.

¹¹⁶ Heb 12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

¹¹⁷ Mat 8:11-12 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Compare this with the promise to Abraham in Gen 13:14-15.

¹¹⁸ Luke 13:28-30 There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

¹¹⁹ Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

¹²⁰ Heb 1:2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

¹²¹ This is demonstrated in his genealogical record as a literal descendent of Abraham and David.

¹²² Luke 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

¹²³ Rom 4:13 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.

¹²⁴ Heb 11:12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

¹²⁵ Mat 3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

And, Luke 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

¹²⁶ Gal 3:6-9 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 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. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Additionally, people are called sons of Abraham by Jesus who were not lineal descendents of Abraham¹²⁷ and people who considered themselves to be sons of Abraham were told by Jesus that in spite of their natural descent, they were not¹²⁸. The children of Abraham were not all blessed with the blessing since it was through the selection of Isaac and Jacob that the line came. This historical example is used to show that God counts the descendents of Abraham as those who are of faith¹²⁹.

God has a plan¹³⁰ for Israel¹³¹, if they come to faith¹³², but that plan is not separate from the church¹³³.

Specific Provision for Ishmael

This was to lead ultimately to two key historical problems. One is that the descendents of Isaac and Ishmael would be in competition in the Middle East. Additionally, the eventual rise of the Islamic religion can be traced to this event. The fruit of Abraham's efforts to fulfill the plan of God continues with us to this day.

Social Promises

The church is to be the blessing in the world that Abraham was. The new covenant is expanded by the new Moses to include the spiritual intent. Instead of an eye for an eye, we are to practice forgiveness in our personal relationships¹³⁴.

¹²⁷ Luke 19:8-9 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

¹²⁸ John 8:39-40 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

¹²⁹ Rom 9:7 -8 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

¹³⁰ Rom 11:25 -28 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

¹³¹ Rom 11:1-2 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.

¹³² Rom 11:23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.

¹³³ 1 Cor 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

¹³⁴ Mat 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Spiritual Promises

Peter notes that the promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing to the entire world was fulfilled in Christ¹³⁵. The promises to Abraham to be saved from his enemies, and those who hate him are fulfilled explicitly in Christ¹³⁶. The blessing of Abraham comes upon the church in the possession of the Holy Spirit by the church¹³⁷.

Current Relationship to the church

The circumcision that God desires is that of the heart¹³⁸, just like the verses from the Old Testament indicated. Abraham's circumcision was a sign of his faith in God¹³⁹. Jesus Christ inherits this also¹⁴⁰.

In the realm of the flesh, circumcision under the Abrahamic Covenant was a sign that the person was part of the covenant community. Adherents of some theological systems use circumcision as part of the apologetic argument for infant baptism¹⁴¹. Both are seen as signs. The New Testament provides a link between baptism and circumcision¹⁴². In the New Testament, we are described as circumcised in Christ by our baptism¹⁴³.

¹³⁵ Acts 3:25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

¹³⁶ Luke 1:67-75 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, 68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, 69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, 74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

¹³⁷ Gal 3:14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

¹³⁸ Rom 2:29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

¹³⁹ Rom 4:11 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:

¹⁴⁰ Rom 15:8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:

¹⁴¹ Durand, Greg Loren. *Circumcision and Baptism in the Covenant of Grace*. On the Internet at : <http://peconic.net/members/f4bs/infantba.htm>. "the Reformed faith teaches that circumcision symbolized many of the same things that baptism now does, but that the latter far surpasses the former in significance. Both are declared by Scripture to be signs and seals of faith, and as such, both are declared to be outward symbols of inclusion in the covenantal community:"

¹⁴² Col 2:11 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: 12 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.

¹⁴³ Col 2:11 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:

Perhaps this is the parallel to the gospel and maybe the final reason for the sacrifice of circumcision. God gave His son for us as the ultimate sacrifice. It caused the Father pain to have the son put to death on the cross. However, the knowledge that the empty tomb lay on the other side of the sacrifice was motivation enough. The son was in the grave for three days and nights, but brought many sons to glory by His resurrection from the dead. In circumcision, the Jews looked forward to the sacrifice of Christ. It was an act of faith in God.

Eschatological Systems

Dispensational Claims

Dispensational Premillennialism requires that the promises to Abraham be unconditional¹⁴⁴ to furnish a Scriptural proof for the land promises. Dispensational authors point to where God alone walked through the separate animal carcass halves as evidence that God's covenant with Abraham was unconditional¹⁴⁵. Regardless of the future actions of Abraham or his descendants, they say, God will fulfill his promises to the genetic descendants of Abraham¹⁴⁶. The future fulfillment of the land promises to the lineal descendants of Abraham continues to be one of the major distinctives of Dispensational theology.

Covenantal Claims

Covenantal authors claim that the covenant God made with Abraham had several conditions attached including circumcision¹⁴⁷. All of these conditions relate to obedience to the conditions of the covenant¹⁴⁸. They see a continuity of the covenant between that made with Abraham through faith, and the covenant of those who place their faith in Christ.

Interaction between the Views

Both Covenantal and Dispensational theologians have written critically of each other's views on this particular issue. For instance, Pentecost¹⁴⁹ criticizes Allis¹⁵⁰ on this very

¹⁴⁴ Ryrie, Charles C., *Basic Theology*, p. 455, Ryrie wrote: "The unconditionality of the Abrahamic covenant furnishes an important support for Premillennialism, since the land promise needs a future time (the Millennium) in which it will be fulfilled."

¹⁴⁵ The Dispensational literal hermeneutic is stretched in this instance to rely on an allegorical interpretation of an event (God's passing through the animal carcasses) the meaning of which is shrouded with the passage of time. Additionally, Abraham, not God, killed the animals used in the sacrifice and kept the wild animals off the sacrifice.

¹⁴⁶ Ryrie, Charles C., *Basic Theology*, p.454. Ryrie wrote: "Clearly the Abrahamic Covenant was not conditioned on anything Abraham would or would not do; its fulfillment in all its parts depends only on God's doing."

¹⁴⁷ Allis, Oswald T., *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 34 makes a case for circumcision as an act of obedience.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 32-36 has 6 specific arguments in support of the thesis.

¹⁴⁹ Pentecost, J. Dwight, *Things to Come*, answers the arguments presented by Allis about 15 years earlier. Pentecost's book was his thesis paper for Dallas Theological Seminary.

¹⁵⁰ Allis, Oswald T., *Prophecy and the Church*, develops several arguments along these lines.

point¹⁵¹. Allis, in turn, had written critically of the teachings of Classic Dispensational author C. I. Scofield. Pentecost claims that the covenant was not actually instituted in Genesis 17, but rather with the initial promise by God in Genesis 12, 13, and 15. Thus, he argues, if it was a condition of the covenant, why would it be offered later? Pentecost differentiates between receiving the covenant and enjoying the blessing of the covenant¹⁵². However, Pentecost does adequately not deal with the force of the passage where God says that anyone not being circumcised would be cut off from the people¹⁵³.

Conclusions

The goal of the covenant God made with Abraham was a pure heart in service to Him. Abraham met God in faith and was counted as righteous due to that faith. The lineal sons of Abraham did not meet the conditions of the Covenant because they were not circumcised in heart. Only a remnant met God in faith.

Each of the promises to Abraham was ultimately fulfilled in Abraham's heir, Jesus Christ. Christ inherited the land, heir, spiritual and the social promises. In Christ, the Church becomes heir of all these things.

**John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day:
and he saw it, and was glad.**

¹⁵¹ Pentecost, J. Dwight, *Things to Come*, p. 80.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 80. ...circumcision is related to the enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant rather than to the institution or continuance of the covenant.

¹⁵³ Gen 17:14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

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