

The Abrahamic Covenant

by A.W. Pink

The Abrahamic Covenant is a central promise in the Bible that God will bless all families of the earth through Abraham and his descendants, demonstrating His sovereign pleasure and grace.

Scripture: Genesis 9:25-27, Genesis 12:3, Isaiah 30:18, Matthew 1:1, John 4:22, Acts 7:2-3, Romans 4:11, Romans 11:5, Galatians 3:16, James 2:23

Topics: "Grace and Obedience", "Covenant Theology"

Description

A.W. Pink explores the significance of the Abrahamic Covenant, emphasizing Abraham's unique role as 'the friend of God' and the father of all believers. He highlights how the covenant not only established a special relationship between God and Abraham but also set the stage for the blessings that would extend to all nations through Abraham's lineage. Pink discusses the historical context leading up to the covenant, including the prophecy of Noah and the events at Babel, illustrating God's sovereign grace in choosing Abraham amidst a world steeped in idolatry. The sermon underscores the dual principles of grace and responsibility inherent in the covenant, showing that while God's promises are rooted in grace, they also require human obedience. Ultimately, Pink reveals that the Abrahamic Covenant is a pivotal moment in God's redemptive plan, foreshadowing the coming of Christ and the inclusion of Gentiles in the blessings of salvation.

Transcript

We shall now consider one of the most illustrious characters set before us in the pages of Holy Writ, one who is expressly designated "the friend of God" (Jam. 2:23), and from whom Christ Himself derives one of His titles, "the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). Not only was he the one from whom the favored nation of Israel sprang, but he is also "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11). It is scarcely consonant with our present design to review here the remarkable life of this man; yet the history of Abraham--in its broad outlines, at least--is so closely bound up with the covenant which Jehovah made with him, that it is hardly possible to give any exposition of the latter without paying more or less attention to the former. Nevertheless, we shall be obliged to pass by many interesting episodes in his varied experience if our discussion of the Abrahamic covenant is to be kept within anything like reasonable bounds.

A period of more than three hundred years passed from the time that the Lord made the covenant with Noah and the appearing of Abraham upon the stage of sacred history. We may here note briefly two things which occurred in that period, and we do so because of the bearing which they have and the light

they throw upon our present subject. The first of these is the remarkable prophecy uttered by Noah in Genesis 9:25-27. Passing by the sad incidents which immediately preceded and gave rise to the prediction, we would observe particularly its pronouncements as they intimated the future development of God's purpose of grace. This comes out first in the "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem," or as it should more properly be rendered, "Blessed be [or "Praised be"] Jehovah, the God of Shem." This is the first time in Scripture that we find God calling Himself the God of any particular person; moreover, it was as Jehovah He should be related to Shem.

Jehovah is God made known in covenant relationship: it is God in His manifested personality as taking subjects into His free favor; it is God granting a revelation of His institutions for redemption. These were to be the specific portion of Shem--in sharp contrast from the curse pronounced upon Ham; not of Shem simply as an individual, but as the head of a distinct section of the human race. It was with that section God was to stand in the nearest relation: it was a spiritual distinction which they were to enjoy: a covenant relation, a priestly nearness. A special interest in the divine favor is what was denoted in this primitive prediction concerning Shem. His descendants were to be the line through which the divine blessing was to flow: it was among them that Jehovah was to be known, and where His kingdom was to be set up and established.

"God shall enlarge Japheth, and he [Japheth] shall dwell in the tents of Shem." The obvious meaning of the first clause is, God would give Japheth a numerous posterity, with widely extended territories, which has been fulfilled in the fact that they have not only gained possession of all Europe, North and South America, and Australia, but likewise a large portion of Asia. The stock of Japheth was to be the most energetic and ambitious of Noah's descendants, giving themselves to colonization and diffusive operations, pushing their way and establishing themselves far and wide. But it is the second clause of Genesis 9:27 we are now more concerned with: "and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem"--he was to enjoy fellowship in the high spiritual privileges of Shem. Japheth was to come under the divine protection and be admitted to the blessings which were the peculiar but not exclusive portion of Shem.

Throwing the light of the New Testament upon this ancient prophecy, we find it clearly announced that it was through the line of Shem that the gifts of grace and the blessings of salvation were more immediately to flow. Yet so far from them being confined unto that section of the human family, the larger portion of it (Japheth) would also share their good. The Shemites were to have them firsthand, but the descendants of Japheth were also to participate in them. "The exaltation of Shem's progeny into the nearest relationship to God, was not that they might keep the privilege to themselves, but that first getting it, they should admit the sons of Japheth, the inhabitants of the isles, to share with them in the boon, and spread it as wide as their scattered race should extend" (P. Fairbairn).

Here, then, in this early prediction through Noah we have the germ of what is more fully developed in later Scripture. It was only by entering the tents of Shem that Japheth could enter the place where divine blessing was to be found, which, in the language of the New Testament is only another way of saying that from the Jews would salvation flow forth unto the Gentiles. But before we develop that thought a little further, we would mention a very striking point brought out by E. W. Hengstenberg in his most suggestive three volume work on The Christology of the Old Testament. Amid his dry and technical notes on the Hebrew text, he shows how that "as the reaction against Ham's sin had originated with Shem (Gen. 9:23), Japheth only joining himself in it; so in the future, the rich home of salvation and piety would be with Shem, to whom Japheth, in the felt need of salvation, should come near."

"And he [Japheth] shall dwell in the tents of Shem." The earth was to be possessed and peopled by the three sons of Noah. Of them, Shem was the one selected to be the peculiar channel of divine gifts and communications; but these were to be not for his own exclusive benefit, but rather to the end that others might share in the blessing. The kingdom of God was to be established in Shem, but Japheth should be received into its community. Therein was intimated not only that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22), but also the mystery of Romans 11:11, and so forth. Though "salvation is of the Jews," nevertheless, Gentiles should be partakers of it. Though Shem alone be the real root and trunk, yet into their tree the Gentiles should be "grafted!" Though he appeared to speak dark words, yet, by the Holy Spirit, Noah was granted amazing light and was given a deep insight into the secret counsels of the Most High.

The connection between what we have briefly dwelt upon above with our present subject is so obvious that few words are called for in connection therewith. The remarkable prophecy of Noah began to receive its historical unfolding when the Lord announced to the patriarch, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Abraham was of the stock of Shem (Gen. 11:1, 23, 26), and he was now made the depository of the divine promises (Gal. 3:16); yet God's blessing was to be confined neither to himself nor to his lineal descendants, but "all families of the earth" were to be the gainers thereby. Yet, notwithstanding, it was only through Abraham that the Gentiles were to be advantaged: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"--the central promise in the Abrahamic covenant. What was that but reaffirming, in more specific detail, "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem"? How perfect is the harmony of God's wondrous Word!

The second thing to be noted, which happened during the interval between the Noahic and the Abrahamic covenants, and which clearly had a bearing upon the latter, is the incident recorded in Genesis 11--namely, the building and overthrow of the tower of Babel. It is a great mistake to regard that event as an isolated occurrence; rather is it to be considered as the heading up of an evil course and movement. Of the events which transpired from the Deluge to the call of Abraham embracing an interval of over four centuries--the information we possess is brief and summary, yet enough is recorded to show that the character of man is unchanged, the same in principle and practice as it had been before the Flood. It might perhaps have been expected that so terrible a judgment would have left upon the survivors and their descendants for many generations a deep and salutary impression, which would have acted as a powerful restraint upon their evil propensities. Alas, what is man!

Even in the family of Noah, and while the remembrance of the awful visitation of God's wrath was still fresh in their minds, there were indications which testified to both the existence and exercise of sinful dispositions, which the recent judgment had failed to eradicate or even curb. The sad failure of Noah himself, and the wicked behavior of his son on beholding the fall of his father, afforded awful proof that the evil which is in the heart of fallen man is so deeply rooted and so powerful that nothing external, no matter how frightful, can subdue it; and supplied a distinct foreboding of what was soon made manifest on a wider scale and in a much worse form. Idolatry itself quickly found an entrance and speedily established itself among the inhabitants of the earth in their dispersion. Joshua 27:2 gives us more than a hint of this, while Romans 1:21-23 casts a flood of light upon that dark situation.

Within a short time after the Deluge, human depravity resumed its old course and manifested itself in open defiance of heaven. As the population of the earth increased, evil schemes of ambition began to be entertained; and soon there appeared on the scene one who took the lead in wickedness. He is first brought before us in Genesis 10:8: "Nimrod: who began to be a mighty one in the earth." It is to be noted that he belonged to the line of Ham, upon which the divine curse had been pronounced, and significantly

enough "Nimrod" means "the Rebel"--suitable title for the one who headed a great confederacy in open revolt against God. This confederacy is described in Genesis 11; and that it was an organized revolt against Jehovah is clear from the language of Genesis 10:9: "Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the Lord." If that expression be compared with "The earth also [in the days of Noah] was corrupt before God," the impression conveyed is that this "Rebel" pursued his impious and ambitious designs in brazen defiance of the Almighty.

Four times over we find the word mighty connected with Nimrod. First, in Genesis 10:8 it said that "he began to be a mighty one in the earth," which suggests that he struggled for the preeminence, and by force of will and ability obtained it; the "mighty one in the earth" intimates conquest and subjection, becoming a leader and ruler over men. This is confirmed by "the beginning of his kingdom was Babel" (Gen. 10:10), so that he reigned as a king. In the previous verse we are told, "He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord"--the reference probably is to his being a hunter of men. In so brief a description the repetition of those words "mighty hunter before the Lord" are significant. The word for "mighty" is gibbor, and is translated in the Old Testament "chief" and "chieftain." In 1 Chronicles 1:10 we are told, "And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be mighty upon the earth." The Chaldee paraphrase of this verse says, "Cush begat Nimrod, who began to prevail in wickedness, for he slew innocent blood and rebelled against Jehovah."

"And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel" (Gen. 10:10). Here is the key to the first nine verses of chapter 11. In the language of that time "Babel" meant "the gate of God" (see Young's Concordance); but afterwards, because of the divine judgment inflicted there, it came to mean "confusion." By coupling together the various hints which the Holy Spirit has here given us, it seems quite clear that Nimrod organized not only an imperial government over which he presided as king, but that he also introduced a new and idolatrous worship, most probably demanding--under pain of death--that divine honors be paid his own person. As such he was an ominous and striking type of the Antichrist. "Out of that land he went forth into Assyria [margin] , and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah," and so forth (vv. 11, 12). From these statements we gather the impression that Nimrod's ambition was to establish a world empire.

Though Nimrod is not mentioned by name in Genesis 11, it is clear from 10:10 that he was the "chief" and "king" who organized and headed the movement and rebellion there described. "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Here is discovered a concerted effort in most blatant defiance of God. He had said, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth" (9:1); but Nimrod and his followers deliberately refused to obey that divine command, given through Noah, saying, "Let us make us a name lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

It is clear from Genesis 10 that Nimrod's ambition was to establish a world empire. To accomplish this, two things were necessary. First, a center of unity, a city-headquarters; and second, a motive for the inspiration and encouragement of his fellows. The first was secured in "the beginning of his kingdom was Babel" (10:9); the second was supplied in the "let us make us a name" (11:4), which intimated an inordinate desire for fame. Nimrod's aim was to keep mankind together under his leadership--"lest we be scattered abroad." The idea suggested by the "tower"--considered in the light of its whole setting--was that of strength, a stronghold; while its name, "the gate of God," tells us that Nimrod was arrogating to himself divine honors. In it all, we may discern Satan's initial attempt to forestall the purpose of God concerning His Christ, by setting up a universal ruler of men of his providing.

The response of heaven was swift and drastic. "And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth" (11:6-9). Once again the human race had been guilty of open apostasy. Therefore did God intervene in judgment, bringing to naught the ambitious scheme of Nimrod, confounding the speech of his subjects, and scattering them abroad on the face of the earth.

The effect of God's intervention was the origination of the different nations and the formation of "the world" as it continued up to the time of Christ. It was then that men were abandoned to their own devices, when God "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16). Then was executed that terrible judicial hardening, when "God also gave them up to uncleanness," when "God gave them up unto vile affections," when "God gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Then and thus it was that the way was cleared for the next stage in the outworking of the divine plan of mercy; for where sin had abounded, grace was now to superabound. Having abandoned (temporarily) the nations, God now singled out one man, Abraham, from whom the chosen nation was to spring.

II.

"And therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious" (Isa. 30:18)--wait until the most suited time, wait until the stage is prepared for action, wait until there is a fit background for Him to act from; wait, very often, until man's extremity has been reached. "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4). Winter's frosts and snows must do their work before vegetation is ready to bud and blossom. As it is in the material creation, so it is in the realm of divine providence. There is a wonderful order in all God's works, an all-wise timing of the divine actions. Not that the Almighty is hampered or hindered by finite creatures of the dust, but that His wondrous ways may be the more admired by those who are granted spirituality to discern them. "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. 15:3).

Having dealt in judgment at Babel, God was then pleased to manifest His grace. This has ever been, and will ever be, true of all God's dealings. According to His infinite wisdom, judgment (which is God's "strange" work) only serves to prepare the way for a greater and grander outflow of His redeeming love. Having abandoned (temporarily) the nations, God now singled out the man from whom the chosen nation was to spring. Later, God's rejection of Israel resulted in the enriching of the Gentiles. And we may add, that the judgment of the great white throne will be followed by the new heaven and new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell and upon which the tabernacle of God shall be with men. Thus it was of old: the overthrow of the tower of Babel and the dispersion of Nimrod's impious followers were succeeded by the call of Abraham, through whom, ultimately, the divine blessing should flow to all the families of the earth.

The lesson to be learned here is a deeply important one: the connection between Genesis 11 and 12 is highly significant. The Lord God determined to have a people of His own by the calling of grace, a people which should be taken into privileged nearness unto Himself, and which should show forth His praises; but it was not until all the claims of the natural man had been repudiated by his own wickedness, not until his utter worthlessness had been clearly exhibited, that divine clemency was free to flow forth on an enlarged scale. Sin was suffered to abound in all its hideousness, before grace superabounded in all its blessedness. In other words, it was not until the total depravity of men had been fully demonstrated, first

by the ante-diluvians and then again by the concerted apostasy at Babel, that God now dealt with Abraham in sovereign grace and infinite mercy.

That it was grace, grace alone, sovereign grace, which called Abraham to be the friend of God, appears clearly from his natural state and circumstances when the Lord first appeared to him. Abraham belonged not to a pious family where Jehovah was acknowledged and honored; instead his progenitors were idolaters. It seems that once more "all flesh had corrupted his way in the earth." The house from which Abraham sprang was certainly no exception to the rule; for we read, "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods" (Josh. 24:2). There was nothing whatever, then, in the object of the divine choice to commend him unto God, nothing in Abraham that merited His esteem. No, the cause of election is always to be traced to the discriminating will of God; for election itself is "of grace" (Rom. 11:5) and therefore it depends in no wise upon any worthiness in the object, either present or foreseen. If it did, it would not be "of grace."

That it was not at all a matter of any goodness or fitness in Abraham which moved the Lord to single him out to be the special object of His high favor is further seen from Isaiah 51:1, 2: "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you." While it be true that God never acts capriciously or at random, nor arbitrarily--that is, without some wise and good reason for what He does--yet the spring of all His actions is His own sovereign pleasure. The moment we ascribe any of God's exercises unto aught outside of Himself, we are guilty not only of impiety, but of affirming a gross absurdity. The Almighty is infinitely self-sufficient, and can no more be swayed by the creatures of His own hand, than an entity can be influenced by nonentities. Oh, how vastly different is the Deity of Holy Writ from the "God" which present-day Christendom dreams about!

"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran. And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I will shew thee" (Acts 7:2, 3). The divine title employed here is a remarkable one, for we regard it as intimating that the shekinah itself was manifested before Abraham's wondering gaze. God always suits the revelation which He makes of Himself according to the effect which is to be produced. Here was a man in the midst of a heathen city, brought up in an idolatrous home. Something vivid and striking, supernatural and unmistakable, was required in order to suddenly change the whole course of his life. "The God of glory"--in blessed and awesome contrast from the "other gods" of his sires--"appeared unto our father Abraham." It was probably the first of the theophanic manifestations, for we never read of God appearing to Abel or Noah.

If our conclusion be correct that this was the earliest of all the theophanic manifestations (God appearing in human form: cf. Gen. 32:24; Josh. 5:13, 14; etc.) that we read of in the Old Testament, which anticipated the incarnation itself, as well as marked the successive revelations of God to men; and if this theophany was accompanied by the resplendent glory and majesty of the shekinah, then great indeed was the privilege now conferred upon the son of Terah. Nothing in him could possibly have merited such an amazing display of divine grace. The Lord was here "found" of one that "sought him not" (Isa. 65:1), as is the case with each of all those who are made the recipients of His everlasting blessing; for "there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11). It is not the lost sheep which seeks the Shepherd, but the Shepherd who goes after it, and reveals Himself unto it in all His love and grace.

God said unto Abraham: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I will show thee." Those were the terms of the divine communication originally received by our patriarch. This command from the Most High came to Abraham in Mesopotamia, in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans, which was situated near the Persian Gulf. It was a call which demanded absolute confidence in and full obedience to the word of Jehovah. It was a call for definite separation from the world. But it was far more than a bare command issuing from the divine authority: it was an effectual call which demonstrated the efficacy of divine grace. In other words, it was a call accompanied by the divine power, which wrought mightily in the object of it. This is a distinction which is generally lost sight of today: there are two kinds of the divine call mentioned in Scripture, the one which falls only on the outward ear and produces no definite effect; the other which reaches the heart, and moves unto a real response.

The first of these calls is found in such passages as, "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men" (Prov. 8:4), and "For many be called" (Matthew 20:16). It reaches all who come under the sound of God's Word. It is a call which presses upon the creature the claims of God, and the call of the gospel, which reveals the requirements of the Mediator. This call is universally unheeded: it is unpalatable to fallen human nature, and is rejected by the unregenerate: "I have called, and ye refused" (Prow. 1:24); "And they all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luke 14:18). The second of these calls is found in such passages as "Whom he called, them he also justified" (Rom. 8:30); "Called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

The first call is general; the second, particular. The first is to all who come under the sound of the Word; the second is made only to the elect, bringing them from death unto life. The first makes manifest the enmity of the carnal mind against God; the second reveals the grace of God toward His own. It is by the effect produced that we are able to distinguish between them. "He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:3, 4)--follow the example which He has left them (1 Pet. 2:21). They follow Him along the path of self-denial, of obedience, of living to the glory of God. Here, then, is the grand effect wrought upon the soul when it receives the effectual call of God: the understanding is illuminated, the conscience is convicted, the hard heart is melted, the stubborn will is conquered, the affections are drawn out unto Him who before was despised.

Such an effect as we have just described is supernatural: it is a miracle of divine grace. The proud Pharisee is humbled into the dust; the stout-hearted rebel is brought into subjection; the lover of pleasure is now made a lover of God. He who before kicked defiantly against the pricks, bows submissively and cries, "Lord, what wouldest Thou have me to do?" But let it be said emphatically, nothing but the immediate power of God working upon the heart can produce such a blessed transformation. Neither financial losses, family bereavements, nor a dangerous illness can effect it. Nothing external will suffice to change the depraved heart of fallen man. He may listen to the most faithful sermons, the most solemn warnings, the most win some invitations, and he will remain unmoved, untouched, unless the Spirit of God is pleased to first quicken him into newness of life. Those who are spiritually dead can neither hear, see, nor feel spiritually.

Now it is this effectual call that Abraham was the subject of when Jehovah suddenly appeared to him in Ur of Chaldea. This is evident from the effect produced in him. He was bidden to "get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I will show thee" (Acts 7:3). Think of what that involved: to forsake the land of his birth, to sever the nearest and dearest of all natural ties, to make a complete break with his old manner of life, and step out on what appeared to carnal reason to be an

uncertain venture. What was his response? "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" (Heb. 11:8). Ah, my reader, that can only be satisfactorily accounted for in one way: almighty power had wrought within him; invincible grace had conquered his heart.

Before proceeding further, let us pause and take stock of our own souls. Have we experienced anything which at all corresponds to this radical change in the life of Abraham? Have you, have I, been made the subjects of a divine call which has produced a right-about-face in our lives? Have we been the subjects of a divine miracle, so that grace has wrought effectually upon our hearts? Have we heard something more than the language of Scripture falling upon our outward ears? Have we heard God Himself speaking in the most secret recess of our souls, so that it may be said, "The gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5)? Can it be said of us, "The word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13)? Is the Word working effectually in us, so as to govern our inner and outer man, so as to produce an obedient walk, and issue in fruit to God's glory?

Though the response made by Abraham to the call which he had received from the Lord clearly demonstrated that a miracle of divine grace had been wrought within him, nevertheless, God suffered sufficient of the "flesh" to appear in him so as to evidence that he was still a sinful and failing creature. While regeneration is indeed a wonderful and blessed experience, yet it is only the beginning of God's "good work" in the soul (Phil. 1:6), and requires His further operations of sanctification to carry it forward to completion. Though a new nature is imparted when the soul is brought from death unto life, the old nature is not removed; though the principle of holiness is communicated, the principle of sin is neither annihilated nor exterminated. Consequently, there is not only a continual conflict produced by these contrary principles, but their presence and exercise prevent the soul from fully attaining its desires and doing as it would (Gal. 5:17).

Abraham's obedience to the divine command was both partial and tardy. God had bidden him to leave his own country, separate from his kindred, and "come into the land" which He would show him (Acts 7:3). His failure is recorded in Genesis 11:31: "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." He left Chaldea; but instead of leaving behind his kindred, his father and nephew accompanied him. This was the more excuseless because Isaiah 51:2 expressly declares that God had called Abraham "alone." It is significant to note that the word "Terah" means "delay," and such his presence occasioned Abraham, for instead of entering the land of Canaan at once, he stopped short at Haran, and there he remained for five years until Terah died (Gen. 11:32; 12:4, 5).

And why did the Lord suffer the "flesh" in Abraham to mar his obedience? To indicate to his spiritual children that absolute perfection of character and conduct is not attainable in this life. We do not call attention to this fact so as to encourage loose living or to lower the exalted standard at which we must ever aim, but to cheer those who are discouraged because their honest and ardent efforts after godliness so often fall below that standard. Again; there is only One who has walked this earth in perfect obedience to God in thought and word and deed, and that not occasionally, but constantly and uninterruptedly; and He must "have the pre-eminence in all things." Therefore God will not suffer Christ's glory to be reduced by fashioning others to honor Him as He did. Finally, God's permitting the flesh to exist and be active in Abraham further magnified the divine grace, by making it still further manifest that it was through no

excellency in him that he had been called.

"Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land" (Acts 7:4). Though God had suffered the flesh in Abraham to mar his obedience, yet He would not allow it to completely triumph. Divine grace is not only magnified by the unworthiness of its object, but it is glorified in triumphing over the flesh and producing what is contrary thereto. The hindrance to Abraham's obedience was removed, and now we see him actually entering the place to which God had called him.

III.

The first thing recorded of Abraham after he had actually entered the land of Canaan is the Lord's appearing unto him and his building an altar: "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord" (Gen. 12:6, 7). There are several details here which claim our attention.

1. Abraham did not settle down and enter into possession of the land, but "passed through it," as Acts 7:5 tells us: "And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set foot on."

2. The presence there of "the Canaanite"--to challenge and contest the possession of it. So it is with the believer: the flesh, the devil, and the world unite in opposing his present enjoyment of the inheritance unto which he has been begotten; while hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies wrestle with those who are partakers of the heavenly calling (Eph. 6:12).

3. "The Lord appeared unto Abram." He had done so originally as the "God of glory," when He revealed Himself to the patriarch in Chaldea. There is no intimation of Abraham receiving any further revelation from God during his delay at Haran; but now that God's call had been fully obeyed, he was favored with a fresh manifestation of Him.

And now Abraham's obedience is rewarded. At the beginning the Lord had said, "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen. 12:1); now He declared, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (v. 7). This brings before us a most important principle in the ways of God, which has often been lost sight of by men who only stress one side of the truth. That principle is that divine grace never sets aside the requirements of divine righteousness. God never shows mercy at the expense of His holiness.

God is "light" as well as "love," and each of these divine perfections is exemplified in all His dealings with His people. Moreover, in the exercise of His sovereignty God never enforces the responsibility of the creature; and unless we keep both of these steadily in view, we not only become lopsided, but lapse into real error. The grace of God must not be magnified to the beclouding of His righteousness, nor His sovereignty pressed to the exclusion of human accountability. The balance can only be preserved by our faithfully adhering to Scripture. If we single out favorite verses and ignore those which are unpalatable to the flesh, we are guilty of handling the Word of God deceitfully, and fall under the condemnation of "according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law" (Mal. 2:9). The principles of law and gospel are not contradictory, but supplementary, and neither can be dispensed with except to our irreparable loss.

What has been pointed out above supplies the keys to a right understanding of the Abrahamic covenant; and unless those dual principles be steadily kept before us in our contemplation of the same, we are certain to err. Some writers when referring to the Abrahamic covenant speak of it as "a covenant of pure grace," and such it truly was; for what was there about Abraham to move the God of glory to so much as notice him? Nevertheless, it would be equally correct to designate the Abrahamic covenant "a covenant of righteousness," for it exemplified the principles of the divine government as actually as it made manifest the benignity of the divine character. Other writers have referred to the Abrahamic covenant as an "unconditional one," but in this they erred, for to talk of "an unconditional covenant" is a flat contradiction in terms. Suffer us to quote here from our first chapter:

"Let us point out the nature of a covenant; in what it consists. 'An absolute complete covenant is a voluntary convention, pact, or agreement between distinct persons, about the ordering and dispensing of things in their power, unto their mutual concern and advantage' (J. Owen). Blackstone, the great commentator upon English law, speaking of the parts of a deed, says, 'After warrants, usually follow covenants, or conventions, which are clauses of agreement, contained in a deed, whereby either party may stipulate for the truth of certain facts, or may bind himself to perform, or give something to the other' (Vol. 2, p. 20). So he includes three things: the parties, the terms, the binding agreement. Reducing it to still simpler language, we may say that a covenant is the entering into of a mutual agreement, a benefit being assured on the fulfillment of certain conditions."

We supplement by a quotation from H. Witsius: "The covenant does, on the part of God, comprise three things in general. 1st. A promise of consummate happiness in eternal life. 2nd. A designation or prescription of the condition, by the performance of which, man acquires a right to the promise. 3rd. A penal sanction against those who do not come up to the prescribed condition. . . . Man becomes the other party when he consents thereto: embracing the good promised by God, engaging to an exact observance of the condition required; and upon the violation thereof, voluntarily owning himself obnoxious to the threatened curse."

Let it now be pointed out that in this chapter we are turning to another side of the subject from what we have mainly dwelt upon in the previous ones. In those we amplified what we said in the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the second chapter. Having dwelt so largely upon the divine sovereignty and grace aspects, we need to weigh carefully the divine righteousness and human responsibility elements. Having shown how the various covenants which God made with men adumbrated the central features in the everlasting covenant which He made with Christ, we are now required to consider how that in them God maintained the claims of His righteousness by what He required from the responsible agents with whom He dealt. It was not until after Noah "did according to all that God commanded him" (Gen. 6:22) by preparing an ark "to the saving of his house" (Heb. 11:7), that God confirmed His "with thee will I establish my covenant" (Gen. 6:18) by "I establish my covenant" (9:9). Noah having fulfilled the divine stipulations, God was now prepared to fulfill His promises.

The same thing is clearly seen again in connection with Abraham. There is no hint in Scripture that the Lord entered into any covenant with him while he was in Ur of Chaldea. Instead, the land of Canaan was then set before him provisionally: "The Lord 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" (Gen. 12:1). The order there is unmistakably plain. First, God acted in grace, sovereign grace, by singling out Abraham from his idolatrous neighbors, and by calling him to something far better. Second, God made known the requirements of His righteousness and enforced Abraham's responsibility by the demand there made

upon him. Third, the promised reward was to follow Abraham's response to God's call. These three things are conjoined in Heb. 11:8: "By faith Abraham, when he was called [by divine grace] to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance [the reward], obeyed [the discharge of his responsibility]; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Nor does what has just been said in anywise conflict with what was pointed out in previous chapters. The above elements just as truly shadowed forth another fundamental aspect of the everlasting covenant as did the different features singled out from the Adamic and the Noachic. In the everlasting covenant, God promised a certain reward unto Christ upon His fulfilling certain conditions--executing the appointed work. The inseparable principles of law and gospel, grace and reward, faith and works, were most expressly conjoined in that compact which God entered into with the Mediator before the foundation of the world. Therein we may behold the "manifold wisdom of God" in combining such apparent opposites; and instead of carping at their seeming hostility, we should admire the omniscience which has made the one the handmaid of the other. Only then are we prepared to discern and recognize the exercise of this dual principle in each of the subordinate covenants.

Not a few writers supposed they magnified the grace of God and honored the Mediator when affirming that Christ Himself so fulfilled the conditions of the covenant and so met every requirement of God's righteousness that His people have been entirely freed of all legal obligations, and that nothing whatever is left for them to do but express their gratitude in lives well-pleasing to Him. It is far easier to make this mistake than it is to expose it. It is true, blessedly true, gloriously true, that Christ did perfectly discharge His covenant engagements, magnified the law and made it honorable, that God received from Him a full satisfaction for all the sins of His people. Yet that does not mean that the law has been repealed, that God rescinds His righteous claims upon the creature, or that believers are placed in a position of privilege from which obligation is excluded; nor does it involve the idea that saints are freed from covenant duties. Grace reigns, but it reigns "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21) and not at the expense of it.

Christ's obedience has not rendered ours unnecessary: rather has it rendered ours acceptable. In that sentence lies the solution to the difficulty. The law of God will accept nothing short of perfect and perpetual obedience; and such obedience the Surety of God's people rendered, so that He brought in an everlasting righteousness which is reckoned to their account. Yet that is only one half of the truth on this subject. The other half is not that Christ's atonement has inaugurated a regime of lawlessness or license, but rather has it placed its beneficiaries under additional obligations. But more: it had procured the needed grace to enable those beneficiaries to discharge their obligations--not perfectly, but nevertheless, acceptably to God. And how? By securing that the Holy Spirit should bring them from death unto life, impart to them a nature which delights in the law, and work in them both to will and to do of God's good pleasure. And what is God's good pleasure for His people? The same as it was for His incarnate Son: to be perfectly conformed to the law in thought and word and deed.

God has one and the same standard for the head and the members of His church; and therefore we are told, "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). In 1 Peter 2:21 we read, "Christ also suffered for us." With what end in view? That we might be relieved from all obligation to God? That we might pursue a course of lawlessness under the pretense of magnifying "grace"? No, indeed; but rather "leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps." And what is the nature of that example which Christ has left us? What, but "fulfilling the law" (Matthew 5:17), loving the Lord His God with all His heart and mind and strength, and His neighbor as Himself? But in order to do this there must be a nature in harmony with the law and not enmity against it. Could Christ declare, "I delight to

do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8), so can each of His redeemed and regenerated people say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man," (Rom. 7:22). And were there nothing else in them but the new man they would render perfect obedience to the law. Such is their honest desire, but the presence of the old man thwarts them.

The everlasting covenant was, in its nature and contents, a mixed one, for the principles of both law and grace were operative therein. It was grace pure and simple which ordained that any from Adam's fallen race should be saved, as it was amazing and infinite grace that provided the Son of God should become incarnate and serve as their surety. But it was law pure and simple that the Surety should earn and purchase their salvation by His rendering unto God a perfect satisfaction on their behalf. Christ was "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). His whole life was perfectly conformed to the precepts of the law, and His death was an enduring of the penalty of the law; and all of this was in fulfillment of His covenant engagements. In like manner, these two principles of grace and law are operative in connection with the administration of the everlasting covenant--that is, in the application of its benefits to those on whose behalf Christ transacted. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31).

The work of Christ has released the believer from the law as a procuring cause of his justification, but it has in nowise abolished it as his rule of life. Divine grace does not set aside its recipient's responsibility, nor does the believer's obedience render grace any the less necessary. God requires obedience (conformity to His law) from the Christian as truly as He does from the non-Christian. True, we are not saved for (because of) our obedience; yet it is equally true that we cannot be saved without it. Unless Noah had heeded God and built the ark, he had perished in the Flood; yet it was by the goodness and power of God that the ark was preserved. It is through Christ, and Christ alone, that the believer's obedience is acceptable to God. But it may be asked, Will God accept an imperfect obedience from us? The answer is yes, if it be sincere; just as He is pleased to answer our poor prayers when presented in the all--meritorious name of His Son.

Once again we would point out that any covenant necessarily signifies a mutual agreement, with terms to be carried out by both parties. A vivid but most solemn example of this is found in the case of Judas and the chief priests of the Jews, concerning whom we read: "they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver" (Matthew 26:15). That is to say, in return for his fulfilling the contract to betray his Master into their hands, they would pay him this sum of money, which, in Acts 1:18, is denominated "the reward of iniquity." It is only by paying close attention to all the expressions used in Scripture of God's covenant and of our relation thereto, that we can obtain a right and full conception thereof. We read of those "that take hold of my covenant" (Isa. 56:4, 6); "that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God" (Dent. 23:12); "those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Ps. 50:5); "mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies" (Ps. 25:10); "be ye mindful always of his covenant" (1 Chron. 16:15); "Ye break my covenant" (Lev. 26:15); "them that forsake the holy covenant" (Dan. 11:30).

Against what has been said above, it may be objected that this reduces the covenant of grace to one and the same level with the covenant of works. Not so, we reply; for though those covenants have something in common, yet there is a real and radical difference between them. Each of them maintains the claims of God's righteousness by enforcing the requirements of the law, but the covenant of works had no mediator, nor was any provision made for those who failed under it; whereas the covenant of grace supplies both. Moreover, under the covenant of works obedience was rendered unto an absolute God, whereas under the covenant of grace it is given to God in Christ, and there is a world of difference between those two

things. The application of these principles to the case of Abraham we must consider next.

IV.

In the application unto Abraham of those divine principles considered in the preceding chapter, it should be quite obvious that the law of his obedience was attended with both promises and threatenings, rewards and punishments, suited unto the goodness and holiness of God, and fitted for the discharge of his moral responsibility. It may be asked, Where is there any hint in Scripture of any provisos and terms attached to the Abrahamic covenant, or any clear statement that God stipulated any terms to him? Such a question is capable of several answers. In the first place, unless there were such provisos and terms, no covenant had been made at all. Second, the extreme brevity of the Genesis account must be borne in mind; and instead of expecting a full categorical statement, its fragmentary details need to be carefully pieced together. Third, Genesis 12:1 shows plainly that Canaan was first set before him provisionally.

In addition to what has just been said, we would point out what the Lord declared in connection with the sign and seal of this covenant: "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" (Gen. 17:14). Here, then, it is clear that a condition was stipulated, the failure to meet which broke the covenant. Again, in Genesis 18:19 we find God saying, "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 [in order that] the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." Abraham had to "keep the way of the Lord," which is defined as "to do justice and judgment"; that is, walk obediently, in subjection to God's revealed will, if he was to receive the fulfillment of the divine promises. Once more, we read "Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:5). Thus, while God dealt with Abraham in pure grace, it is plain that he was also placed under the law.

Some readers are likely to object, This is a wretched subversion of the glorious covenant of grace: by your "conditions," "terms," and "provisos" you reduce it to a contingency and uncertainty, instead of its being "ordered in all things and sure." Our first rejoinder is that we have not introduced the conditions and provisos into the covenant; instead, they are so stated in Scripture. God did not make an absolute grant of Canaan unto Abraham when He first revealed Himself to him in Chaldea. Rather was he required to tread the path of obedience unto that land "which he should after receive for an inheritance." Nor does God make an absolute (or unconditional) grant of heaven when the sinner first believes in Christ. Instead, He requires him to walk the narrow way which alone leadeth unto life, and faithfully warns him that it is to his imminent peril if he converges therefrom.

It may be replied, But this is to leave all at an uncertainty. It all depends upon the angle from which you view it. Considered as the object of God's everlasting love, as chosen in Christ, as redeemed by Him, as indwelt and sealed by the Spirit, the believer's safely reaching heaven is placed beyond all peradventure. But consider the believer as a responsible agent, as still having the "flesh" in him, living in a world where he is beset by temptation on every side, called upon to "fight the good fight of faith" and to "lay hold on eternal life," and the matter appears in quite another light; and the one viewpoint is just as real and actual as is the other! The difficulty here as to whether or not the believer's "keeping" or "breaking" the covenant renders all insecure, is precisely the same as showing the consistency between divine preservation and Christian perseverance. Though the "ifs" of John 8:31 and Colossians 1:23 do not annul the promise of Philippians 1:6, nevertheless, they are there, and must be taken into account by us.

From the divine side, the covenant of grace is "ordered in all things and sure." There is not the slightest possibility of anything in it failing. Christ will "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied," and not one of those given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world will be lost. But that does not alter the fact that while the elect are left here in this world they are bidden to "make their calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10), "if they may apprehend [lay hold of] that for which also they were apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12). The covenant has provided for the communication of effectual grace to secure the saints' obedience and perseverance; yet that does not alter the fact that God still enforces His righteous claims upon them and deals with them as moral agents who are required to heed His warnings, obey His precepts, and use the means He has appointed for their preservation.

Some experience difficulty in fitting together those Scriptures which present eternal life as the present and inalienable possession of the believer with other passages that place it in the future and as only being attained unto by following a course of self-denial. Such verses as John 5:24 and Romans 6:23 are quite simple to them; but Romans 6:22; 8:13; Galatians 6:8; and Jude 21 they are at a loss to know what to do with. But there is nothing inconsistent between a believer acting from a principle of grace and life already communicated to him by the Holy Spirit, and his so acting that he may live. A man must be alive before he can eat; yet he must eat in order that he may live. Were he to cease entirely from the taking of food, would there be any life for him in a month's time? Neither would the Christian enter heaven if he entirely neglected the means of grace appointed for his spiritual preservation.

Of old, Moses said unto Israel, "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" (Deut. 30:6). Was he, then, inconsistent when, at the close of the same address, he declared: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: For he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them" (vv. 19, 20)? Was Moses there setting before them a "yea and nay gospel"? Emphatically, no; for he was the mouthpiece of Jehovah Himself. Nor was this appeal a "legal" one, but a strictly "evangelical" one. Alas, that so many today err, "not knowing the Scriptures." "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations"--not merely from Moses till Christ (Deut. 7:9)--yes, and with no others. This verse is just as much a part of the holy and inspired Word of God as is Ephesians 2:8, 9; and the one is needed by us as much as the other.

It might be objected, This is bringing in a legalistic inducement and inculcating a mercenary spirit to put the believer upon using means in order to obtain his preservation, and setting before him heaven or eternal life as a reward for his faithfulness. In reply, let us quote from the renowned and evangelical Dutch theologian: "A mercenary baseness is certainly unworthy of the high-born sons of God, but their heavenly Father does not forbid them to have any regard to their own advantage in the exercise of holiness. David himself confesseth that, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. 'By them is Thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward' (Ps. 19:9, 11). And the faith of Moses is commended because 'he had respect unto the recompense of the reward' (Heb. 11:26). Yea, that faith is required of all who come to God, that they 'must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him'--Heb. 11:6" (from *Irenicon*, by H. Witsius, 1696).

To anticipate one more objection--not with any expectation of convincing the carping critic, but rather in the hope of helping some who are in a state of bewilderment from the one-sided teaching of our unhappy day--But does not all of the above inculcate the principle of human merit? No, for it is due alone to divine grace that the believer has had communicated to him a principle of obedience--a heart or nature which desires to please God. Furthermore, it is solely for Christ's sake that God so liberally rewards the sincere endeavors of His people, for apart from the Mediator and His merits, they could not be accepted by Him. Finally, there is no proportion whatever between the Christian's obedience and the reward he receives--the inheritance infinitely exceeding his poor efforts--any more than there was in God's giving Canaan to Abraham and his seed because he left Chaldea.

Coming closer now to our immediate theme, it should be pointed out that the Abrahamic covenant is not to be regarded as a thing apart, having no direct connection with what went before or what followed it; but rather is it to be viewed as a part of and a further step in the unfolding unto God's people of His eternal counsels. The call of Abraham was a most important step in the outworking of God's purpose. It was one of those remarkable epochs in the history of the church which produced a new order of things, in perfect keeping with, yet greatly in advance of, what had previously been communicated. The work of preparation for the appearance of the Messiah now assumed a more tangible form and entered on a phase bearing more visibly upon the attainment of the ultimate result. The line from which the promised Seed was to spring was now more definitely defined, while the scope of divine grace was more clearly revealed.

The declaration made by the Lord God in Eden after Adam's transgression, that the Seed of the woman should triumph over and destroy the serpent, had been the ground of the saints' faith and the object of their hope during the first two thousand years' history of the world. Until the time of Abraham, nothing more had been revealed concerning the person of the coming deliverer (so far as Scripture records) than that He was to be of the human race; but of what particular family, or even of which nation, no one was informed. Where men were to look for Him, whether in Egypt, in Babylon, or in some other land, did not yet transpire. But in the covenant which God made with Abraham, not only was the promise of a Savior renewed, but His family and place were now made known. For this great honor the "friend of God" was selected: to him it was revealed that the Messiah should spring from his stock, and that the land of Canaan would be the scene of His glorious mission.

Not only should the Abrahamic covenant be regarded as part of a greater whole rather than an isolated transaction, but attention must not be restricted to any single episode in the patriarch's life or God's dealings with him. We fully agree with John Kelly when he said, "If we would form an accurate estimate of that covenant, and of the truth which it was the means of revealing, we must not confine ourselves to any one particular transaction in which allusion is made to it, however important that transaction may have been. Our examination must embrace all the incidents recorded. We must bear in mind that everything that occurred to Abraham, from his call to the close of his life, was intended to explain and illustrate the nature of the Covenant."

It was not by one specific communication that the mind of God was fully disclosed unto Abraham. Several were made at different times, all relating to the same subject and unfolding the import of the covenant; while the character of Abraham himself--shaped by the various trials through which he was called to pass and molded by grace through faith--throws important light upon the conceptions which he entertained of what had been revealed to him. All these form one homogeneous whole; and from them, thus considered, we are to form our views of the covenant. When Abraham was first called by the Lord, a bare hint was given him of the divine purpose, which, under the Spirit's blessing, was the means of quickening his faith

and producing the decision which he made. Yet only a glimpse was then afforded him of what God designed: it was not the formal establishment of the covenant. That event took place subsequently, after an interval of some years.

What has just been said appears to receive confirmation from Galatians 3:16, 17: "Now to Abraham and his seed was the promise made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." "Four hundred and thirty years" prior to the giving of the law at Sinai takes us back to the beginning of God's dealings with Abraham, recorded in Genesis 12, though the actual term covenant is not found in that chapter. It is not until we reach Genesis 15:18 that we find the transaction itself: "In that same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land." Then in Genesis 17 we find the sign and seal of the covenant--circumcision--given. To the covenant there are other references in the chapters which follow: in Genesis 22 the covenant is confirmed. Thus, in fact, the covenant received important and successive enlargements during the intercourse which God, in infinite condescension, continued to have with His servant. Hebrews 6:13-18 links together the great promise of Genesis 12:3 and the oath of Genesis 22:15-18.

In our endeavor, then, to obtain a correct and comprehensive view of the divine transaction in the Abrahamic covenant, we are required to carefully examine all the information which the Genesis narrative supplies: the leading events in Abraham's own life (which are designed as a contribution for imparting an explanation), and the light which the New Testament casts upon them both, and regard all in its entire unity as illustrative of the covenant. To confine ourselves to one passage, however important it may seem to be, would be doing injustice to the subject. It is failure at this point which has resulted in so many superficial, inadequate, and one-sided discussions of the same by various writers. Those who approach the examination and consideration of the Abrahamic covenant (or any other Scriptural theme) with a single pet theory or idea in their minds, which they are determined to establish at all costs, cannot expect to obtain a right and full view of the covenant as a whole.

We shall, then, regard the Abrahamic covenant as a striking advance in the development of God's gracious purpose toward men, and yet as only a part of a greater and grander whole. In so doing, what will claim our special attention is, What was the particular nature and what the amount of the truth, which it was the means of revealing? Upon these points a very wide diversity of opinion obtains, both among the older and more recent writers. Exactly what did the Abrahamic covenant make manifest to the minds and hearts of God's people of old? And how far does the same apply to us now? The proper answers to these questions must be drawn from Holy Writ itself, fairly interpreted. Perhaps our best course is to single out the leading particulars, and then comment thereon as each may seem to require.

V.

"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: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3). In this simple narrative we have the original promise made to Abraham that the Messiah should come of his family. This divine pledge was made to the patriarch when he was only a little short of seventy-five years of age. It was given at a point in human history halfway between the creation of the first Adam and the

incarnation of the last Adam that is, two thousand years after the entrance of sin into the world and two thousand years before the advent of the Savior.

The first great purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was to make known the stock from which the Messiah was to spring. This was the most prominent aspect of truth revealed in it: the appearing of the promised Seed in Abraham's own line. The primary intimation of this was given to the patriarch when God first appeared to him: "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Two things are to be noted in the language there used. First, the "all families of the earth be blessed" obviously looks back to Genesis 3:17, for the "all families" was sufficiently definite to announce the international scope of the blessing. It is indeed very striking to observe that in Genesis 12:3 God did not use the word *eretz* (as in Gen. 1:1; 14:19; 18:25, etc.), but *adamah* (as in Gen. 3:17). The manifest link between "Cursed is the ground" (Gen. 3:17) would have been made more evident had Genesis 12:3 been rendered "in thee shall all families of the ground be blessed"--the curse was to be removed by Christ!

Second, the terms of this Messianic intimation were quite general in their character. Later, this original promise was repeated in more specific form: the "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" being defined as "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." This illustrates an important principle which may be discerned throughout the divine revelation, namely, that of progressive unfolding: "first the blade, then the ear,

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-abrahamic-covenant/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net