

Leadership And Covenants (Part Eighteen)

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It is my hope that with the help of my previous sermon in this series that it has firmly reached your mind with a clear solid faith and understanding that you now have a skeletal framework of your spiritual life in Jesus Christ.

Biblical covenant is a contract describing the goals to be accomplished by those who agree to that contract's terms. A covenant assigns responsibility with all the parties involved. It states penalties for those who fail to participate as required, and it lists benefits given to those who abide by those terms.

We spent much of the time in that previous sermon describing the activities that led to Abram being named as God's friend—Abraham, father of the faithful. The faithful are those found to be trustworthy, reliable, and dependable at following the terms of the agreement that they made with their Savior, who is also known as our Creator. He is our Messiah, and He is the promised Seed of the judgments given by God in Genesis 3.

It was He who laid down His life as the payment for our sins that even makes this agreement that we have made with God possible.

Genesis 12:7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

As we ended that previous sermon, we had just begun briefly covering the "I will" promises that guarantees, in this particular case, what is called the Promised Land to Abram and his descendants. I am taking this particular "I will" out of the order that it is given within the Scriptures. It was the last of the "I will[s]," but in historical reality the first promise accomplished, time wise. In a peculiar sense the fulfillment of the other promises depend on this particular "I will" being fulfilled first and it was.

Here is why. Everything in this huge creative process must be placed in order for clear understanding. We will go back a little further in time. Abraham's land in the Bible is exceedingly important. We must not forget that Adam was created from land, from the soil of the ground. Eve was then created from a part of Adam, therefore she too owes her existence to the soil of the ground, and God's awesome creative processes.

What God is doing through the "I will[s]" is guaranteeing Abram and his descendants. As we get further and further into the story that is *us*, because he is the father of the faithful, and we of course believe that we are part of that faithful. He is guaranteeing them, and us, physical and spiritual prosperity.

Again, back in thought to the ground. All wealth comes from the ground and our lives are sustained by what the soil produces in the way of food. In addition, mineral wealth too is from the ground.

Abram's descendants are going to grow into a nation, with the land as an important mental-like thinking in which everything is linked with land, the ground, and especially the Promised Land

involved in this. In order for these “I will[s]” to be produced the first thing that is necessary was a homeland.

To this day—this is long after Jesus Christ gave the “I will[s]” of which the Promised Land was a part—what are the Israelis and Muslims fighting for? The same piece of ground that Jesus Christ promised to Abram. The land that God promised cannot be minimized without destroying the lessons of its vital spiritual importance, the spiritual aspect of the “I will” go right along with the rest of them if the land is there in which to work.

Genesis 15:1-6 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Abram’s appeal was, in God’s good time, heard and given. The word ‘accounted’ in verse 6, “and he believed in the Lord and he accounted it to him for righteousness,” is there first of all, to help us to understand Abram’s mindset toward God, at the same time it describes God’s reaction to the mindset that He perceived in Abram. He believed God.

God is stating His approval of Abram’s trust and belief in the Creator’s word and character. This is going to become spiritually very important to us later on. This is the root of what we will see later on.

The son that God promised to Abram and Sarah was Isaac, following Isaac came Isaac’s son Jacob, then Jacob produced twelve sons. The families of these three families ranged all over the area of the Promised Land without ever owning even an inch of it for generations. From this a major thing that we learn about faith regarding God, and God’s promises, is that everything moves according to God’s timing. We have to learn this, we have to believe it, and we have to put that into practice in our life. We have to deal with it.

If God has made a promise, there is nothing we can do except yield to what He demands of us. It was going to exceed four hundred years before the land that God set apart for them was actually, literally, going to be that family’s possession.

Genesis 15:12-16 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

We see a figure there, four hundred years. Turn to Exodus 12. This will help confirm the passage of time.

Exodus 12:37-40 Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves. Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.

This accounts for four hundred and thirty years of that period of time that God mentioned in Genesis 15.

Genesis 15:18-21 On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezites, and the Kadmonites; the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Rephaim; the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

That has not taken place yet. We will add something. Go all the way to the book of Joshua. I am going through this because I want you to see how those people had to live in faith, in what God had promised to their father Abraham, and they had to do it for a great deal of time. What is taking place here in Joshua 19 is the distribution of each of the areas, those provinces that were dealt out to each tribe. They are getting to the end of that process.

Joshua 19:51 These were the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel divided as an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So they made an end of dividing the country.

Finally in Joshua 19, the Israelites are in the land, in the possession of the land, and each tribe is in possession of its territory within the land. It was over four hundred years from the time that God made the prophesy. It points out that what I said earlier. When God makes a promise we have to wait on Him. Abraham lived that faith till he died, and so did Isaac, Jacob, and all the way up to Joshua, Moses' helper, until they finally, actually, were in the land and in possession of the land.

If there is a fairly clear spiritual lesson here this is what I think it is: no matter how fantastic, and urgently needed we believe a promise of God is to us, fulfillment cannot be forced to move faster than the sovereign God allows. Our part of the covenant is to trust Him. Sometimes that is a tall order because we are filled with anxiety, impatience, and maybe we get to demanding things from Him. I am sure that He expects that those kind of things will come from us and He patiently deals with us, but all of our impatience is not going to change His mind, because there is a lot more hanging on these issues than me.

Genesis 12:2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.

These promises are directly linked, and they are a response to God's command to Abram to leave his homeland. Here is a thought at the base of these promises. God is making a deal with Abram: if Abram is to lose a great deal in his exile away from his birth land, all the friendships that he has had up until this time, he is in turn promised by God great gain. This is what is stated in verse 2.

It seems from the point of time in which God is promising, it is incentive for Abram to move on, to motivate him. God is making the covenant more attractive. It is important to Abram that this occurs, because everything at this point in time, within the "I will[s]" is linked to whether Abram has sufficient faith to trust God, to first move from his homeland and take residence in some mysterious place God chooses, and Abram has no knowledge of. This was a great leap of faith.

We must grasp this situation from Abram's point of view. He was, as we might say, literally flying blind, without any electronic instrumentation to aid him. Flip your mind forward to Jesus and the counseling sessions that He had with Nicodemus. When Jesus told Nicodemus something that seemed fantastic to him, what was Nicodemus's reply? He said, "How can these things be?" This was no dumbbell in terms of spiritual things. He did not have spiritual truth, but he was at least humble enough to make this response. He understood enough to know that Jesus was telling him was something that was beyond the grasp of Nicodemus' mind at that particular time.

How in the world do you think Abram felt? He did not respond in the same way Nicodemus did, and maybe that is to his favor. At least God was pleased with it. Abram leaving his homeland and its spiritually-defiling polytheism—he was learning that—and the idolatry that was being practiced there was going to be a great blessing all by itself. Abram may not have realized that right from the start, even though it was true what God was telling him to do was good. Abram's only support was his faith in the One who was saying it.

I think there is enough information for him and for us, to understand that he knew that he was talking to the Lord. This was a God he really did not know. He grew up in pagan land, but he had learned enough already to trust the word of this God.

The promises began to be fulfilled because he lived by faith in the one making the promises. He did not ask for proof first, he believed the One who was making the promises. Those living by faith must grasp that believing God and following through with action, always contains within it a measure of risk of loss. It does not matter whether it was Abram, or you and me. When God opened up our mind and began filling it with His Word, we too had to face the possibility that it could cost us. There is in the calling of God sometimes a great possibility of sacrifice that might not be seen right on the surface. Sometimes we miss it.

We are all confronted by the same basic scenario as Abram in our calling, except the stakes for us are not as high as they were for him. Nonetheless, we are called upon by God to forsake our way of life within our environment.

You see the principles that we are dealing with Abram? They are the same thing that we have to deal with in our calling. We may be called to give up family, religion, plans, job, way of life, some material prosperity, shame, because we are humbled. Like Abram, we are also promised so much more in return, if we will dedicate our life by living in faith in the Creator God, by following His way of life. That is why this is in the book, so that we are able to see examples from people that God dealt with in the past. This particular man that He dealt with here, way at the beginning of Genesis, was a giant in terms of faith. He responded in the right way.

We will look more closely at God's promise, especially as it applies to Abram. The statement "I will make you into a great nation" is most directly personal. To be more rightly and clearly understood, this promise must be grasped as, "I will make *you* [Abram] a great nation. The emphasis was on Abram. The "great" is, first of all, in terms of a large population, therefore what God is promising is that the fulfillment is going to proceed from Abraham's body. Not from conquest, not through business deals and skills, but by the literal birth of family descendants.

God is not merely promising to make up for any loss to him due to his moving to a better, safer, purer place of prosperity. There is certainly that within it, but He is promising to exceed that loss by a tremendous amount. Not a little bit. What God is promising Abraham is *big*. He is promising Abraham great *nationhood*.

It is right here that it is necessary for us to understand the term that I used in my previous sermon, without expounding on it, it is important for its impact then. I was saving it for now. The term is "unconditional." It means not prohibited, not blocked by anything, it means absolutely nothing can stop this promise from being fulfilled. Grasping the unconditional aspect is incredible on five counts. Now follow this. This is with Abram.

1) At the time that this promise is given he has not even moved one inch yet, because he has not yet decided to leave his homeland. 2) he has not even gotten to the Promised Land. 3) he is already seventy five years old, and his sixty five year old wife is barren. 4) the great nation aspect especially emphasizes a large population. However to add to that difficulty, it also suggests economic riches, and persuasive influence over others and he does not even own one square inch of ground that he has even casually seen. This is no little stuff. 5) we now know that except for his and Sarah's burial plot, he never does own any land, anywhere.

Wealth normally derives from real estate that is properly used and worked at with wisdom and vigor in order to produce wealth. All of this is pretty amazing. Remember one word I said here that I have not expounded on we will expound on now. Suppose Abram was a doubter, suppose like Nicodemus who came back with a question, "How can these things be?" what if Abram had said, "What if I become an idolater?" Remember this promise is unconditional, nothing can stop it from being fulfilled.

What is going to keep it going is the fact that God, as the Creator, knows He can change this man. A man with that kind of faith can be changed into a carbon copy, as it were, of God. That is why it is unconditional. He perceived Abraham's heart, so if Abraham comes back with a question, "What If I become an idolater?" then considering that God made this unconditional, what would God's response be? He would say, "I can make you into a great nation." That is how confident God was that He could change this man. If it is unconditional, I cannot think of another response that would give away the unconditional of what God had said.

Suppose Abraham came back with another question. "What if I had a child and he becomes an idolater?" The answer has to be the same, "I will make you a great nation." We will really stretch this and put words into Abram's mind. Abram asks this question, "What if my children become so hardened they crucify Your Son?" God would reply the same way, because He would know it was never going to happen. He had confidence in Himself that He could change Abraham. This is why Abraham is so monumental! It is his faith! He believed God, and he was already on his way, because of the faith that was there.

Another question here. Do you understand what God is accomplishing by operating His creative process in this way? God always does things the best way.

First of all He was glorifying Himself as He fulfills His purpose because the fulfilling speaks so highly of God's trustworthiness to you and me, who like Abram believed. God is confident He can change us if we have the faith that Abram had. I will get around to showing you why that faith is so important.

You know God spending all of this time on Abram that somehow or another this faith is actually about as important as any spiritual qualities can possibly be. Fourteen chapters just on Abram, the father of the faithful. We are learning lessons through the way he reacted to God, and the way God reacted to him. God's real confidence was in His ability to change Abram. If He can change Abram, He can change you and me too, if we live by faith.

Remember I said in my previous sermon, God is not expecting us to have faith to the same degree, to the same height that Abram did, but we have to live up to the faith that God gives *us* to live by, and He never gives us a problem that is too great for the faith that He gave to us. That is His promise.

The first reason is because, it glorifies God to do it this way. Eventually we come to the place where we understand that everything we do in relation to God we are doing because of the grace that He has given us to enable us to do those things. So it glorifies Him, and at the same time it provides encouragement to the faith of those who follow Abram. If God did it for Abram, He will do it for you and me as well.

Those who spiritually follow Abram will know by their faith that growth was really produced by God's power, and His sense of time, not ours, because of what it does is produce humility. None of us can brag before God, it humbles us.

What God actually produces is a reality that can be trusted, the reality of what God is, and the reality of His promises as well. On the other hand, literally seeing the growth does not matter regarding faith in God. *It is who and what God is that matters to faith.* It is what *He* says that matters to the faithful, not time. The historical reality is that God did begin fulfilling what He said—that He would provide to Abram even before Abram died. Therefore what God said, envelops a great deal of time.

Genesis 13:1-2 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

To those of faith, time becomes much less of a meaningful concern within a promise that God makes. Why? The answer is deep and simple, at one and the same time. Because as we have a relationship with God, we learn gradually it is impossible for God to lie. That is really comforting.

Thus, this leads to an inescapable conclusion. Abram's name, meaning his spiritual reputation, has been made great by God. That is what the "I will," says. "I will make your name great." We will ask another question here: to whom does God make Abram's name great to? He makes Abram's name great to those who matter spiritually to God. It does not matter what the world thinks about Abram. What matters to God is what His own children think about Abram.

Abram's name is glorified by God before Abram, and I will say God's children, because he is the father of the faithful. Those are the people that God loves and cares about, so He makes Abram's name—his reputation—great before you and me.

If you are with me and you understand these "I will[s]," you know eventually the whole world is going to call Abram great, because eventually they are going to be His children too. Right now the only ones that God is interested in understanding the greatness of Abram is you and me, because he is our father, the father of the faithful, and we better love our father. If we do not love him, what in the world are we even in that family for? This is rich stuff, and we are only on Genesis 13.

He makes Abram's name great to those who matter spiritually to God, and He makes it great to those of true faith, who rely on the same God that Abram trusted. Even beyond the initial wealth that we read of in Genesis 13, the greatness is begun being expanded then through Isaac and Ishmael, but most especially, and most importantly is Isaac. First, because he was the child of promise that God miraculously gave to Abram and Sarah. It was through Isaac that Abram has become the father of hundreds of millions of physical descendants through the centuries—the Israelitish descendants.

It is right here that we have to pause and consider the effects of this more completely, because whether or not we believe this has a great effect upon our understanding of the times that we live in right now, and therefore, our faith and its use. It does not matter whether we are specifically Israelitish by birth, or living within Israelitish nations. What is important is what we believe regarding modern Israel's identity that provides some stability to our understanding of the times that we live in.

The overwhelming majority of those calling themselves Christians at this time in history do not believe what we believe regarding who the descendants of Abram are at this time in history, nor where they are located. Why should this concern us? It is because the promises within the "I will[s]," have not yet been completely fulfilled. They are still in operation, and they are still being worked upon. But who are they going to go to? They are going to be fulfilled in the lives of the descendants of the one the covenant was made with, and that is Abraham. Whether we are physically or spiritually Israelite matters a tremendous amount to the way that we live our lives.

There is no way we can put a dollar value on what we understand about *where* the Israelitish people are, and *who* they are, because it is those people that God is going to carry out His spiritual purpose until Jesus Christ returns, and then it is going to go out to the whole world. But right now we have to deal with all of this that is going on in the world, and very much of this is being worked out in the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Ireland, Iceland, Greenland, Sweden, Norway, and on and on, because that is where the Israelitish people live.

Who is going to have these prophesies in Matthew 24 unfold in their nation? Where the Israelitish people are is very important to the way we exercise our faith. Others calling themselves Christians believe that Abraham descendants are all Jews. That is clearly rejecting what the Bible clearly shows. That almost a thousand years after God made this covenant with Abram the kingdom of Israel divided into two nations. This split occurred during the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son.

The split-apart nations called themselves Israel and Judah. Israel to the north, and Judah to the south. Biblical history clearly shows that each group *went their own way*. Even though they all came from the same family, they went their own way spiritually. And even though they lived side by side in the

same geographical area of the earth for a couple of hundred years, Israel though, after being conquered by Assyria, continued emigrating further, and further north and to the west.

Many to this day calling themselves Christians believe the Israelites simply disappeared by being absorbed within other nations. It is right at this point that they part company with us regarding what we believe regarding prophetic fulfillment. Israel did not disappear, but they did become invisible, because God willed it.

If Israel disappeared, God broke His unconditional promise, but God sovereignly keeps His word. Israel is not alive and well spiritually, but they still exist and they are among the more numerous people on earth.

Just because many do not believe the certainty and the expanse of God sovereignty, nor the depth and breath of the nature of God's promises to Abram, neither do they fully grasp God's working in the histories of man all the way to this point in time. In fact many of these people do not even believe that God exists.

Exodus 31:12-13 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying, 'Surely My Sabbath you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.'"

It is helpful that the Jews continued to keep the Sabbath throughout history, and because they have not continued to be fairly easily identifiable before the world as descendants of Abram. It is a clearly understood truth that signs identify. It is also a truth that the Israelitish people who did not keep the Sabbath seemingly disappeared. They simply abandoned the means of identification God assigned them. Therefore, they did become invisible though still existing because God preserved them, because He is God.

Israel thus became lost in plain sight, because the remainder of the people in the world did not, and still do not, have sufficient faith in God to accept that other identifications as being true, and thus even though the world did not have the much needed faith, the truth is that because God is God, the invisibility of Israel was not total. Israel was not hidden from God. He knew exactly where they were.

Long before Herbert Armstrong, people, largely British, Scot's, and Irish had traced the emigration of the Israelitish people from northwest Europe. In a sense what Herbert Armstrong did was advertise the signs of identification to the historical truth supported by the Bible to those of faith.

The only people who get this are the people who have the faith of Abraham, and Abraham has been magnified before their eyes. That is God doing that, and the people who do not believe in God or His Word, cannot see the identification of the Israelitish people.

It does mean that God was making the identity of Israel available for use in our knowledge and understanding of the times as perceived through the lens of believing the Bible. This is important spiritually, because it effects the impact our faith has in God's promises and how we live our lives, even though it is now perhaps as many as thirty-five hundred years or more after the unconditional promises were given to Abram.

Abram's descendants became a great people. This is because, for us, believing truth impacts one's understanding, and this in turn strengthens belief and thus conduct. What I am about to say is this and

it may at first seem like a contradiction for what I just said in the last five or ten minutes. Is having visible truth regarding issues involved in believing a promise of the Creator God? These things are not absolutely necessary. We do not have to have *visible* proof. This is one reason why I spent so much time on Abraham. He did not know a thing when he believed God. He just believed what God was saying. He had no proof he would ever become a great, mighty people living worldwide.

Here we are thirty-five hundred years or so after Abraham and we begin to have information come to us that God has kept His promise, and the Israelitish people, the descendants of Abraham, are still in existence, and the largest number of them are in Europe.

This is important because most of the prophecies involve the Israelitish people. If we do not believe where the Israelitish people are we are going to have trouble believing those prophecies.

Never forget that salvation is by grace through faith, and what matters—as it did with Abraham—is who our faith is in, not what, and whether we allow our faith to guide and direct our conduct. What matters is whether we believe what God says, and that we must keep His commandments, or whether we believe Jesus is our Savior.

I will clarify by asking some questions and you will see more clearly what I am getting at. Does it provide salvation for us if Noah's ark is truly found? In other words, we would *see* it. Is that going to give us salvation? Our faith has to be in what Jesus Christ says, not a physical object that was even part of the Scripture, that does not matter a bit. Does it really matter if we have the correct arrangement of Egyptian history, so that we know exactly when the children of Israel came out of Egypt, what towns they were in, and so on?

Does it really matter whether the ark of the covenant is discovered, or for that matter that a third temple is built in Jerusalem? Compared to what Jesus said in the "I will[s]" those things are nothing. Is it going to give us prophesy or salvation because we have the prophetic evidences of Jesus Christ down perfectly? That this is going to happen here, this is going to happen there.

No it does not. Salvation is by grace through faith in what the Savior said. This is why God is spending so much time on Abram and his faith.