

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

AND THE HEIRS OF THE PROMISE.

“If you are Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the Promise” (Galatians 3 : 29 NKJ) What was that Promise, and why are so many completely unaware of its relevance under ‘New Covenant’ theology?

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On a spring night a few miles northeast of what would later become Jerusalem, two individuals engaged one another in a conversation that led to an event that would impact the world in the most profound way. Few throughout history would realize the significance of this seemingly unexplainable event or its unusual accompanying ceremony, nor understand its deep prophetic significance, not only as it involved the children of Israel but all God’s people throughout time.

The book of Genesis records this event, in Chapters 14 and 15. The individuals in this drama were Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God and Abram, just after returning from the defeat of the four kings who had conquered the cities of the Salt Sea Valley (today’s Dead Sea region), capturing Abram’s nephew while looting those cities.

Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine, and pronounced a blessing upon Abram, following his God given victory over the four-king alliance. (Gen.14:18) But it was shortly thereafter that a most significant series of events were to occur. In vision, God came to Abram, (15:1) during which Abram began questioning God regarding his not having an heir. God in response reassured him that his direct descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven. We know the time of day this took place. God took him outside, they looked up at the array of uncountable stars, and He said, “So shall your descendants be”. We know from this that their conversation was after it had become dark.

The conversation continued. God additionally promised that he and his descendants would inherit that land. He had brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia for that express purpose. (Gen.15:7) Abram asked how he might be **assured**

of this, to which God replied with this most unique and profound response. (15:8) Abram was given explicit instructions regarding a special sacrifice he was to set in order, not yet knowing what would be taking place.

The following day, during daylight, he did as he was instructed, and waited, and waited, and waited. All the rest of that day he stood guard, waiting, until finally, late in the afternoon, Abram experienced an overwhelming and terrifying premonition, ... *“a horrible great darkness came upon him”*, (Gen.15:12), the significance of which will become apparent later in this article.

The Next Day Begins.

“After the sun was down, and it was dark” (v.17), now fully into the beginning hours of the **next** day, we are given an explicit account of a most solemn and significant ceremony, that few today remotely understand. Most commentaries fail to explain either its symbology or the specific ceremony, let alone its potent significance. That significance involved not only Abram’s physical descendants, but also his Spiritual heirs. The Apostle Paul understood. It seems his modern students do not. Not only do we see in it the Promise as it related to Israel’s future as a nation, destined for enormous prestige and prosperity, but also veiled within this unique ceremony, is a revelation of God’s plan for extending His Covenant of Promise upon all.

A Most Noteworthy Observance.

This night was the night in which God Covenanted unconditionally with Abram. Events on this night and the night previous, attested to and positively established with utmost certainty not only the

promise of inheritance to physical Israel, but also the greater Promises to Abraham's Spiritual seed. The symbology of the sacrificial animals which Abram was told to prepare also subliminally reveal the overall plan through which God would prepare a Spiritual Seed down through time. It becomes especially fascinating to realize that the night on which this Covenant was confirmed for all time was a date that would later become associated more with its first fulfillment, than with its first observance. Later writings of Moses reveal the observance's proper name and date. In Exodus 12: 41 the Children of Israel attained their release from bondage in Egypt. (Numbers 33: 3 reiterates that it was the fifteenth day of the first month, the morrow after the Lord's Passover.) It was the exact date of the Abrahamic Covenant, made 430 years prior, while Deuteronomy 16: 1 tells us that they went out "by NIGHT"! Not only the exact date, but also at the same time of day!, showing God's faithfulness to His Promises! This occasion being known by Moses' time and perpetually afterward as "**The Night to be Much Observed**": That evening beginning the fifteenth day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar. We'll see that this exact date appears at least four times in the fulfillment of God's Promises to His peoples.

"If You Are Christ's",

The Apostle Paul, in relating our ethnic heritage as being irrelevant, in his epistle to the mostly Gentile Galatians, explains that it is faith that justifies, law-keeping alone can't justify. What matters is our faith **in** Christ and our having the Faith **OF** Christ, and that Faith making us an heir and thus of the seed of Abraham, as Christ was, (He being his Spiritual Seed). (Gal. 3:29)

By TWO Immutable Things.

There is a passage in the book of Hebrews which most are familiar with, that relates there are "two immutable things" that provide to "the heirs of promise" the absolute assurance of receiving that "hope set before us". Few can explain exactly what these TWO things are. It begins in Hebrews 6: where it talks about God having Covenanted with Abraham, in which: "*He, by two immutable things*

we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." This passage, which begins in verse 13 and ends in verse 18, doesn't seem to give the modern reader a totally clear picture of what those two things are, (although, when you come to understand what they are, then it does become obvious). The problem is that we, in our time and culture, do not have an understanding of those ancient customs, which were well known in the days of Abraham and the Patriarchs. So, let's examine this passage:

Heb.6:13 "When God made a promise to Abraham ... (this is talking about the Abrahamic Covenant being confirmed) ... because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself ... (that seems to be one thing) ...saying surely I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you. So after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. V.16: "For men truly swear by a greater and an oath by confirmation to them is an end to all strife. Wherein God willing more abundantly to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us".

One thing is very obvious. This is not talking about receipt of the physical promises. This is especially apparent when we couple that with this passage in Galatians 3:29:

"And if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise".

It is important we understand what these "two immutable things" are. It provides the basis of our full confidence and hope. As the Apostle Paul shows, the "New Covenant" is heavily dependant upon the Original Covenant made with 'the father of the faithful': Abraham, some 430 years before Mt. Sinai, where the next phase, what we call the "Old Covenant" was first presented to God's chosen people.

The Abrahamic Covenant is the foundation of both Old and New Covenants. The Abrahamic Covenant existed for 430 years before there even was an Old

Covenant. The Old Covenant offered physical blessings, not eternal life. The Abrahamic Covenant provides both physical and Spiritual Promises, if you read it carefully. The Apostle Paul understood the implicit Spiritual component in what God promised to Abraham. What's especially important is the realization that the Abrahamic Covenant remains in effect today, as the **true basis** of Faith!

Christ is the Spiritual Isaac of the New Covenant. This is essentially the point in Galatians 3:29. The New Covenant promise, that we have hope toward, is very much a part of and based upon the promises made to Abraham.

The Sacrifice and the Oath.

We are given a very detailed account of this original "Night to be Much Observed" in Genesis 15. This extremely fascinating passage of Scripture is largely overlooked on account of it being so little understood. Beginning in verse 6 of Genesis 15:

"And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." (Romans 4:3 affirms the same.)

"And He said unto him, I am the LORD that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it. And Abram asked, LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And He said unto him, take an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove and a young pigeon. And he took him all these and he divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against the other, but the birds he divided not."

Now, this kind of sacrifice described here is an extremely rare and unusual sacrifice. What men anciently would do, (and Paul alludes to why in Heb. 6:16), when making an oath of this significance, is that they would take the animals, (not necessarily these, but those animals deemed appropriate to the occasion, (and there's a particular significance to the ones God required be used here)), but they would take the animals and divide them in half lengthwise and vertically. The halves would then be laid out mirror image to one another,

creating a path between the parts. In making this binding covenant, the one making it would walk the path between these laid-out parts. This was a very ancient practice. In fact, we have another Biblical passage describing this kind of sacrifice. It's found in Jeremiah 34: 8-18. The practice, called a "Mal-edictory Oath" is very rare and was extremely effective anciently in affirming the absolute certainty of ones' word.

Not Only His Reputation, But His Life!

We recognize the word "benediction". It means "good words". Well, "malediction" is the opposite. It means "bad utterance", in which the oath maker utters a dire prediction against himself, should he fail to keep his oath! So, when you see a sacrifice of this type, especially one with God being the oath maker, it's something to pay special attention to. The significance was understood in ancient times. The Apostle Paul realized the significance of this solemn occasion, as we can see from Galatians 6. Now, let's look into this account a little more:

Gen.15:9, "Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old...(these were animals in their full maturity – their reproductive prime),... and a turtledove and a young pigeon." (Note that only the dove is of unspecified age.)

Each of these were the main types of animals later used under the Old Covenant sacrificial system.

"And he took unto him all of these and he divided them (lengthwise, vertically) and laid each piece one against the other (mirror image to each other), but the birds (notice) he divided not."... (There'll be significance to this later on.)... "And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. (This shows that it was now daylight, as birds of prey don't fly except in daytime.)... "And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him."

Now, if we read from the context, up in verse 5, we can see that... *"God brought him forth abroad and said, look now toward the heavens and tell me the*

stars if you be able to number them.” So at the time that God spoke the promise, it was dark outside. (Was it about midnight, the 14th ?) They went out, and looked up at the stars. During the NEXT day, he set up the sacrifice and waited. Later, as we get down to verse 12, we find out... *“when the sun was going down”*... so, this is the late afternoon, approaching the beginning of the next day, that is, the approach of “the Night to be Much Observed”! The Abrahamic Covenant was formally confirmed on what we have come to know as “**the Night to be Much Observed**”, though it was spoken on the previous evening! How can we know that? Well, Moses wrote of it. The children of Israel came out of Egypt on that EXACT date when the Abrahamic Covenant was made, that “Selfsame Day” (Exodus 12:41) We have here a substantial self-contained Biblical cross-reference. The Promise was spoken on the evening that later would become Passover, but was confirmed on the original “Night to be Much Observed”!

The Prophetic Component.

Abram was most interested in having a direct heir, and line of descendents. That is the main subject of this conversation. (Gen.15:4) It would be hard to miss the obvious prophecy around which the promise to him is made. In verses 13 and 14, in Abram’s dark vision, it relates that his descendents would be servants for four hundred (plus) years, and God would deal with their oppressor nation, allowing them to come away with great spoils. They would then return to the land where Abram then was. (v.16).

It was in recognition of this prophesy that Moses gave specific instruction for the people to borrow silver and gold and clothing from the Egyptians. God told them exactly when, (Ex.11:2) and they complied just before leaving. (Ex.12:35-36).

So, the time Israel started out from their Egyptian captivity was the **exact anniversary** of the date on which God confirmed His Covenant with Abraham 430 years earlier. That night in which they stepped out in faith, heading toward the Promised Land was the ‘selfsame day’ God told Abraham they would one day be doing this very thing. That same night

in which the two representations of Divine Spirit passed through the ‘path of the shadow of death’.

THE Most Ancient Observance!

So, now when we observe “the Night to be Much Observed” we have much to be aware of. There is a Covenant, even more ancient than the “Mosaic” Old Covenant, one made by a Maledictory Oath, before Abram, with God Himself being Maledictor, dedicating Himself to forfeiture of all, even of His own life, should He fail to keep His word! This Covenant, confirmed by an Oath which remains expressly applicable to those who are Christ’s, the true heirs of the Promise thru faith. Let’s look again at the Genesis 15 account, in verse 12.

“A Horror of Great Darkness”.

“And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him.”

This was the afternoon of the 14th. Now, think about what happened in the later hours of the 14th in the year of Christ’s crucifixion. Christ was on the cross at that hour. And not only was there a three hour period of darkness over the land, but as the horrifying realization of the encroaching blackness of death overwhelmed His consciousness, He screamed out! (Mk.15:34) Abram’s premonition foreshadowed those last conscious moments of Christ’s physical lifetime. Again, Abram’s “horror of great darkness” coinciding exactly with the time of Christ’s impending death!

Then the Exodus prophesy, *“And He said unto Abram, know of a surety, that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs’, and shall serve them”*... (Now, here’s a prophesy of their Egyptian captivity, and the fact that they would successfully spoil the Egyptians before they left, but not before God dealt with their oppressors.)... *”and they shall afflict them 400 years, and also that nation whom they serve will I judge. And afterward shall they come out with great substance”*. (Gen.15:14)

Now down in verse 17, there’s more detail. This is

the most important part. This is during the early hours just after dark, beginning the fifteenth day of the first month,

“And it came to pass that when the sun went down, and it was dark... (these being the hours when we observe “the Night to be Much Observed”)..... ...”Behold, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed between those pieces”... (Those being the two separated halves of the sacrifices) ...”In the same day”... (The fifteenth) ...”the LORD made a covenant with Abram saying, Unto your seed have I given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates.”

So, in verse 5 we see that it was night, the night before the fifteenth. That’s when this promise was spoken to Abram. On the daylight portion of the fourteenth, he prepared the sacrifices. Later in the afternoon, this vision of horror and great darkness fell upon Abram, this in verse 12, having obvious correlation with Christ’s pre-death experience on the cross at about the same hour centuries later!

The Furnace and the Lamp.

In verse 17 we see that it is now after sunset, into the darkness of the fifteenth. That’s when the Covenant was confirmed by an Oath. Hebrews 6:17 & 18 confirms that it was God who made this Oath! The TWO representations: the ‘smoking furnace’ and the ‘burning lamp’, here picturing the Divine Presence. (JF&B 1997, vol.1, page 146)

“Behold, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp also... (the use of the word ‘also’ doubly indicates there are TWO Beings who are being represented here!) ... passed between those pieces.”

Now, the ‘burning lamp’ we can identify with the Word. Psalm 119: 105 speaks of the *“Word (being) a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”* So, this describes representations of God passing along this path in process of making this Covenant Oath. That should tell us something about the seriousness of what’s being presented here. Later, at the beginning of the Exodus, these two were represented semi-unified, as a pillar of cloud (smoke) by day and a pillar of fire (lamp) by night.

These two were ‘baptized by blood’, passing thru this ‘path of blood’. After all, three large animals were slaughtered and bisected on that spot! This on the eve what would later become the First Day of Unleavened Bread. The Israelites were baptized by water, by passing thru the Red Sea the night of the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. (1Cor.10:2)

Considering these TWO representations: we have a ‘**smoking furnace**’ which in the darkness would not have been visible, except for the presence of the ‘**burning lamp**’. It is interesting to consider Matthew 11:27, which shows Christ as being the one who would reveal the Father. Ancient Israel did not deal with, and perhaps did not fully KNOW of the existence of the Being we now know as the Father! (Except to the extent that Christ revealed (threw light upon) His existence!) The Son reveals the Father. Is this an illustration of that component of Truth? Are BOTH Beings: the Father and the Son being represented as ‘passing between’, thus personally making this Immutable Covenant? Are BOTH the Father and the Son equally committed to this Abrahamic Covenant? Do we have strong consolation as ‘heirs according to the Promise’?

Covenant versus Testament?

Lately, and especially since the apostacy that swept thru the Church of God, we heard a lot said about ‘Covenant’ and ‘Testament’. We heard that these terms could be used interchangeably.

Actually, there is a very distinct difference. Covenental Law DIFFERS from Testamental Law. A Covenant is a “Death Oath”, and it remains in force and completely unchangeable up until the death of the one who made the Covenant Oath. A Covenant can not be changed until the one who makes it dies. A Testament is distinctly different in this respect: It’s like a Will. A person can change his ‘last will and testament’ as often as he likes, UP UNTIL his death. That’s a basic difference. To alter someone’s will AFTER they die, would be a serious legal offence. A Testament is in effect after a person dies, where a Covenant is in effect up until the person dies. It’s important we understand the subtle difference in terms.

A Theological Conundrum.

Further on this Covenant / Testament issue, IF Jesus Christ ISN'T the one who made the "Old Covenant" thru Moses, IF He ISN'T the God of the Old Testament, then religion has a major problem! In accordance with Covenantal Law, the "Old Covenant" couldn't have been ended except by the death of the one by whom it was made. If it was the one we know as "the Father", the Father never died, so the Old Covenant could not have been terminated! It would still have to be in effect!

By the same token, IF the Father wasn't represented in the procession of the Maledictory Oath, in confirming the Abrahamic Covenant, then that Covenant could not be still in effect, and Hebrews 6 would have it all wrong in its assurance of Christ's seed being "Abraham's seed and heirs according to the Promise", because, if it was Christ ALONE who passed thru, Christ DIED!!

Those Prophetic Sacrifices!

God directed Abram specifically as to what animals he was to take, and in what order. Abram obeyed. (Gen.15:9) An **heifer**, a she-**goat**, a male **ram**, a **turtledove** and a **pigeon**. The order AND the selections have prophetic significance. We see representations of 'ignorance', 'obstinance', then 'compliance' then lastly, representations of two 'spirits' (John 1:32) These illustrate a spiritual progression, from the Patriarchal era, generally complacent, but spiritually ignorant. (Even in today's world, bovines are thought of as dumb but contented.) Next a female goat: Butt-headed obstinant, typical of Israel's nature during the Old Covenant era. Next, a male sheep, representative of a Christ-likeness, the characteristic of the New Covenant era. God is here illustrating His dealing with humanity thru His Covenant. Specifically the Abrahamic Covenant which remains in effect thru **all** the Covenant Eras!! These sacrificial animals illustrate the progression of God's overall plan.

So, What About the Birds?

Abram did NOT divide the birds (Gen.15:10). Rather, he put each one whole on either side of the path, in order for the procession to pass between.

But what do the two birds represent? We can draw a clue from the progression we've seen this far. The male ram brings us up thru the New Covenant era. What comes after that? What would two very similar appearing representations illustrate beyond the New Covenant era? Why TWO? And, why not use two of the same kind? Also, is their order of mention significant?

A dove and a pigeon are very similar birds, though ordinarily a dove is usually thought of as being pure white. A pigeon, on the other hand, if white, is most likely an 'albino', and thus unfit for being a sacrifice, in that an albino has a pigmentation defect. So we have two similar representations, but one white, the other likely not. (White, of course, represents the righteousness of Saints. (Re.19:8))

It is here proposed that these two birds represent the Covenant in effect in the Millennial Era, in which God will be dealing directly on a Spiritual level with TWO separate kinds of beings: His Spirit-Born resurrected Saints living together with regenerate, but still physical, Saints in His Millennial Kingdom. These both living together, being dealt with on a Spiritual level on a plane not seen in any previous Covenant Era. The dove is presented first, as these are the 'first-fruits'. The pigeon types next, being prepared for eventual spirit-level inclusion in the family of God. (Note: Of all five, only the dove's age is left unspecified!)

More can be drawn from the symbolism. Consider that Christ was crucified BETWEEN TWO Malefactors. (Old English for 'bad guys'.) One was deemed "Kingdom worthy", the other NOT. (Luke 23:43) The One who later became Christ who passed thru this path, passed between the two birds. It's interesting also to notice that the two birds were not cut apart, nor were they bled to death. Abram likely killed them by breaking their necks. Similarly, the two malefactors were not slain with a sword or spear, rather, they were killed by breaking their legs. (John 19:32) They died whole, by the suffocation resulting from that being done to them.

Christ Our Passover.

As a final thought, it's noteworthy that Christ verbally presented the New Covenant at Passover,

ON the fourteenth, but He formally CONFIRMED it by His death and burial roughly a day later. Also, both these events occurring ON the exact anniversaries (the ‘Selfsame Days’) as the Promise and subsequent Oath, made with Abram some two millennia earlier, being on the same nights as the Passover in Egypt and the beginning of the Exodus.

Four Distinct Co-incides.

Not only do we find “the Night to be Much Observed” referred back from the time of Moses in Exodus 12:42, but also again in Joshua 5:11. We find the children of Israel partaking of the produce of the Promised Land for the first time on the ‘morrow after the Passover’. They could not take possession under the Covenant until a certain Covenant pre-requirement had been taken care of. Those men under forty years old had not been circumcised. That being attended to after crossing the river, (see Jos.5:7), then they could be given possession. So we see yet another occasion, an important milestone in the fulfillment of God’s Promise (formal possession) which took place on this same day, the ‘morrow after the Passover’, which began on yet another “Night to be Much Observed”.

1. First, we have the original night on which the Covenant was confirmed with Abram,
2. Then, the beginning of the physical promise fulfillment on the exact anniversary, when the Exodus began exactly 430 years later, on the ‘morrow after the Passover’. (Num.33:3),
3. Then the completion of the physical promise fulfillment 40 years after that, with their taking formal possession of the Promised Land on ‘the morrow after the Passover’. (Jos.5:11) (daily manna ceased thereafter),
4. Then the beginning of the Spiritual fulfillment with Christ’s burial being complete, just at sunset at the onset of the morrow after Passover.

Each of these being important milestones in God’s preparing a people for Himself, all occurring ON what later came to be known as: “the Night to be

Much Observed” also called “the Night to be Much Remembered”.

Some insist we don’t need to keep this day! These same will invariably be found ‘religiously’ observing days that have no verifiable Biblical event ever occurring on them! Go figure!

So, from all of this, we can see that the Abrahamic Covenant, attested to by the Apostle Paul, (the Apostle to the Gentiles), is the BASIS of our confidence in the hope set before us, and is still VALID, and IS enormously relevant to our New Testament Christian experience.

The Two Immutable Things?

Concluding this subject, it’d be good to reconsider the question posed earlier as to just what are the **TWO** immutable things Paul is referring to in Heb. 6:13? (Immutable things don’t just ‘pass away’!)

“For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself..

So, the **first** thing was He gave His absolute word. There was none greater who could make this promise. No one else was incapable of being untruthful. But He did something else in addition, and this was that second thing. We find that in verse 17.

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an Oath”...

This is that **second** thing. Not just His saying so, which should have been enough, but He confirmed it by performing this Maledictory Oath, and doing so on what we know as the “Night to be Much Observed”. So this Promise is doubly locked-in!

God’s Word and His personal Oath guarantees it.

Now we can better understand Hebrews 6:18. Now with this awareness we can better appreciate the certainty of the real hope that is set before us. **Ω**