



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Abrahamic Covenant, part I”

TRANSCRIPT

We’re continuing our series of studies in Eschatology and our subject is The Abrahamic Covenant and Eschatology Part One. I’d like for you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Genesis chapter 12 let me read a few verses in the 12th chapter before we launch into our discussion. Genesis chapter 12 verses 1 through 3.

“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 shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and will 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 families of the earth be blessed.”

“The greatest human character in the Bible is Abraham,” so said Donald Gray Barnhouse in one of his commentaries some years ago. And in the course of his discussion of the greatness of Abraham, Dr. Barnhouse alluded to an ancient program with which many of us who are older are acquainted.

Now back in the Dark Ages we used to see or hear a program called *Strike It Rich*. Dr. Barnhouse said he was driving along the highway once, and he heard the announcer have a man before him offering him a certain amount of money if he could answer the four or five or six questions that led up to the particular answer he had in mind, and if you remember *Strike It Rich*, it was if you of course answered the question with the first clue, you made a great deal of money. If you took another clue you made less money and so on until finally at the end it was possible for you to make only small amount of money if you answered the question which usually was almost given to you.

Well the question involved John the Baptist, and he said that the announcer began with uh something like, Who was the biblical character whose head was brought in on a platter uh for Salome? And this man was unable to answer. Who was the one who was the ambassador of Jesus Christ? He was unable to answer. Finally got down to the last question and the man was so anxious to give him at least a little part of the money. He said, His name was John the Baa--. And the man shouted out, John the Butcher!

[Laughter]

And then with that Dr. Barnhouse said that I think I could ask a question which the great majority of the students of the Bible would miss, and probably a majority of the preachers of the word of God would miss, and his question was this, “Of the characters who appear in the New Testament, what is the order in which they appear according to the frequency of their name?” Now he said, let’s eliminate the Lord Jesus Christ whose name probably appears more than anyone else, and let’s eliminate such statements as Moses saith, or stands written in Moses’ references, which are not really to the character. What is the order frequency of names in the New Testament?

And then he said, “I’m going to give you the answer because you probably would not be able to guess it. First of all, Paul’s name outside of our Lord and outside of these references appears more than anyone else. Then Peter, then John the Baptist, and then

Abraham. And that was the surprise, because Abraham’s name appears more than the Apostle John in the New Testament.

Now you know from the reading of the New Testament that Abraham’s name appears frequently for the simple reason that he is used as an illustration of the Christian life. He is used as an illustration of the method of justification. In Romans chapter 4 for example Abram’s name appears frequently, because it is in that chapter that Paul expounds the relationship of justification by faith to the Old Testament teaching. And the passage that we will look at Genesis chapter 15 looms large in the exposition of that chapter. In Hebrews chapter 11, Abraham consumes a good part of that chapter for his life is a picture of the life of faith.

Perhaps one of the reasons for Jewish error concerning justification and theology in general is because they have failed to sense that Abraham is more important than Moses. They have thought that Moses was more important than Abraham, and it may be because of their misunderstanding of the importance of Abraham that they have been attracted to the legalistic approach to God. At any rate, Abram is a very important character.

Now the Abrahamic Covenant has a corresponding importance in eschatology. It is probably fair to say that this is the important covenant in a book which is covenantal in so much of its structure. Dr. John Wafford President of Dallas Seminary, has said, “In the controversy between premillennarians and amillennarians, the interpretation of this covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, more or less settles the entire argument.” And I think that is true, that if we understand accurately the covenant that God made with Abraham then we will be able to settle the question of amillennialism versus premillennialism.

There are two competing claims that we need to keep in mind. First the claim of the amillennialists that there are no national promises at all. No promises given to Israel as a nation or Israelites as Israelites. The seed of Abraham, according to amillennial

interpretation, refers to a covenantal community apart from racial considerations. That is the claim of the amillennialists.

The claim of the premillennialists is that God gave promises to Abraham specifically, and second, that he gave promises to his believing seed who were also Israelites, and also that he gave promises to his Gentile believing seed. This is the claim of the premillennialists.

Now there are some variations within these general claims, but generally speaking this is the difference between them. Some amillennialists take a slightly different approach than others, but in general, and I think the majority hold to the position that I have set forth here as the amillennial claim, and the majority of the premillennialists hold to the second claim with reference to the promises to Abraham -- his believing Israelite seed and his believing Gentile seed. Well let’s see what the Scriptures have to say about it. Perhaps we can come to some understanding for ourselves.

Now we last time looked at the Noahic Covenant. The Noahic Covenant was concluded three hundred years before the Abrahamic Covenant. In other words, it was three hundred years since Noah’s covenant when God entered into this arrangement with Abraham. Two things had occurred that are of importance.

First, the prophecy that God had given through Noah in Genesis chapter 9 verse 24, 25, 26, and 27. Let me read the prophecy itself. Verses 25 through 27,

“After Noah awoken from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. He said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; (now that is important) God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”

Abraham was of the stock of Shem and now he is made the depository of the promises of God. Very little had been said in the meantime since the time of the promise in the Garden of Eden. In fact, so far as the Scriptures are concerned, between the time of that prophecy and the time of the prophecy in the Garden of Eden that the seed of the woman should crush the serpent's head, no further word had been given about that part of mankind from which the seed of the woman should come. It was merely said that the seed of the woman as broad as the human race should crush the head of the serpent.

Now in the 9th chapter of the Book of Genesis we have an indication, but again it is not specific an indication that God has some special blessing for Shem one of Noah's sons and further, that Japheth another one of the sons shall dwell in the tents of Shem and Canaan shall be his servant. At least we can say this important event had occurred and there is some indication that the Semitic division of mankind is that division of mankind in which we shall find the depository of the blessings of God.

The second thing that occurred between the Noahic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant was the incident described in the 11th chapter of the Book of Genesis in which the tower of Babel was destroyed by God. Now that was a repudiation by God of the natural man, followed by a manifestation of his grace in the call of Abram. These two events, the tower of Babel and its destruction -- which is of course a living picture of the attempt of man apart from God to establish himself in God's creation -- these two incidents are so related that in one we have evidence of the good the severity of God, in the other evidence of the goodness of God. In the one we have the judgment of God in the other we have the exercise of God on the part of God, for remember, Abraham according to Scripture was not a believer when God appeared to him.

As a matter of fact in Joshua chapter 24 and verse 2 I think it is we read, "Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the

other side of the river in old, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.”

In Isaiah chapter 51 verses 1 and 2 we have a similar kind of statement made by the Prophet Isaiah. He calls upon Israel, “Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah who bore you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. I called him when he was alone.”

And then in Acts chapter 7 and verses 2 and 3 Stephen reminds his readers of how the God of glory appeared to Abraham when he dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees. So in Genesis chapter 11 we have the manifestation of the judgment of God at the tower of Babel and now in Genesis chapter 12 we come to the exercise of God’s grace with reference to Abram, and we have indications that in Abram, now, we will have a new depository a more limited depository of the promises of God.

In Genesis chapter 12 verses 1 through 3 the covenant promises are given. They are inaugurated in Genesis chapter 15 in a ceremony that we will look at in more detail in just a moment or two. But let me first of all comment on the parties to the covenant. This is a very simple question to answer, a very simple answer to understand. The two parties to this arrangement are, on the one hand, God and on the other hand, Abram and I want you to be clear about this that the relationship that God had to Abram was a relationship of pure grace. And he said, Stephen did in his speech, “Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory (I imagine since he says the God of glory appeared unto our father that we are to regard the appearance of God to Abraham as being of course, a theophany, but perhaps also an appearance in which a manifestation of the Shekinah glory of God took place). 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.”

Now that is a beautiful illustration of an effectual call. God called Abram and called him effectually, and gave out of his gracious disposition towards Abraham, gave

him the faith to respond to the message that God gave to him. So we have then on the one hand, the party to the covenant, Abram the receiver of the promises of God on the basis of the effectual call in grace of God. That is, by the way, why Abraham is such a beautiful illustration of the total Christian experience, because just like Paul and just like others who are called, he was called by the effectual call in grace of a sovereign God.

The promises of the covenant are expressed for us in verses 2 and 3, and I have suggested that these promises are personal, national, and universal. Now let me spell that out just a little bit. The personal promises were personal promises that were made to Abraham. You will find the statement of them in verse 2 where we read, “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.” That promise is a promise that pertains to Abraham himself.

It is a striking thing as I know I’ve commented before in your presence and others no doubt have pointed it out to you, you probably have known it from the study of the Scriptures, that Abraham is a person who is highly regarded in the three great religions of the face of this earth: in Christianity, in Mohammedanism and in Judaism. Abraham’s name is great. He is great in Judaism regarded as the founder of the faith. He is great in Mohammedanism and he is great in Christianity as the great exemplar of the Christian experience. So that particular promise has been fulfilled. Abraham’s name is great. So those personal promises have been fulfilled. I want you to notice carefully that they are fulfilled literally, too. His name is great.

Now the second classification of promises is national promises to Abram’s seed. They are referred to here in Genesis chapter 12 and also Genesis chapter 15. He says in Genesis chapter 12 verse, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.” And fundamental to the Abrahamic promises is the possession of a particular land. And further, “And I will make of thee a great nation.” So there is reference here to a nation and to a land.

Now since Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 nothing specific has been revealed of the family from whom the seed of the woman shall come, but here we are given the important information that the seed of the woman is to come from the family of Abraham, and it is in Abraham’s seed that this blessing is to take place. From now on Abraham becomes the root and the center of the future history of the world. That is why he is so important for us, for it is in Abram’s seed that the whole of the world shall be blessed. And in fact Abraham is called by Paul in Romans chapter 4 the inheritor of the world. So Abram now is the root and center of the future history of the world.

This promise of the land will be of course enlarged and expanded in chapter 13 chapter 15 of the book of Genesis. It is important of course to recognize that the promise of the land that was made to Abraham and to his seed is a much greater promise than many realize. Voltaire, who is known primarily for his unbelief, is said to have scornfully remarked on Exodus chapter 3 verse 8, where God says that he is come down to deliver Israel from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good land and a large land, Voltaire is reported to have said that “The God of the Jews must have been a petty God, because he gave them a land that was not larger in size than the country of Wales and called it a large land.” But this only reveals the ignorance of Voltaire, because of course the land that God really gave to Abraham and promised to him was a land that was two and a half times as large as Great Britain and Ireland and could be genuinely called a good land and a large land.

Now until Israel possesses that land for themselves as a homeland, the promises that God made to Abraham have not been fulfilled. They are not fulfilled today. Israel only possesses a little land of about twelve thousand square miles or so, and she has been promised a land of three hundred thousand square miles, so there is a great difference between the Israel that we see today and the Israel that God has promised to Israel.

The third class of promises we may call universal promises to Abram’s Gentile seed. We know that Abram’s Gentile seed are involved in the promises made to Abraham

from Galatians chapter 3 verse 16 and verse 28 and verse 29. The Lord Jesus is called the seed of Abraham in Matthew chapter 1 and verse 1. It is there that he is seen to be the seed, and of course, Paul expounds that in Galatians chapter 3, pointing out that this “in thee” of verse 3 “shall all the families of the earth be blessed” is a reference to the Lord Jesus finally. The universal promises are promises that are expressed in that last clause of the 3rd verse. And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. That’s why Abram is called the inheritor or the heir of the world, because all the families of the earth are blessed in him.

You sometime read in books that have to do with the choice of Israel, the Abrahamic Covenant, eschatology, or just in general biblical theology, you sometimes read statements like this: the Nation Israel was chosen by God not as an expression of any sort of favoritism on his part, not as an expression of any kind of special grace, but Israel was chosen because Israel as a nation possessed a genius for religion. In other words there was something in the character of Israel that made them especially responsive to divine things.

Now it’s amazing to me that someone could study the Old Testament and come up with a conclusion like that, because if there is anything that the Bible tells us it is that Israel had no genius for true religion at all, and lest you think of course that you have a little more genius for true religion than Israel, well let me include you in that too, because all of us naturally have no genius for religion of any kind.

Now we may have a genius for religion in the sense in which the term is used commonly of a kind of activity on the part of man in things that are supposedly spiritual by which we hope to gain merit before God, that special sense of religion which, by the way, is the sense in which the term religion is used in the New Testament. It’s a kind of activity on the part of man by which we hope to gain merit before God. But none of us have any genius for any spiritual relationship with God at all. There is none that seeketh after God, no not one, and that includes Israel. That is our natural condition. Not one

seeks after God, no not one, not a single one of us has any kind of positive volition at all. That only comes, if it ever comes, from the activity of the Holy Spirit within us. None. There is none that seeketh after God, no not one.

Now that is a fundamental, basic fact, and a person will never understand the grace of God in the gospel until he understands that basic fact. There is none that seeketh after God no not one. Abram’s life tells that story. Paul’s life in the New Testament tells that story. All of true conversions tell that story, and if you are truly converted -- there may be a few converted people here -- if you are truly converted then your life is also a story of the same thing.

Why was Israel chosen? Why Israel was chosen to be a depository of the divine revelation. It is through Israel that men were to come to know truth. They were in themselves and in their national life to be a depository of divine revelation. After the tower of Babel debacle, God moved and chose one man and works with this one man within humanity and with his seed in order to speak his message to men. That’s one reason Israel was chosen to be the depository of the divine revelation the Scriptures would come generally speaking from them.

Israel was also chosen to be the mother of the Savior. That is outlined for us so beautifully in the 12th chapter of the book of Revelation in which the Apostle John has the vision of the mother the woman who is about to bring forth the male child. John says in the 12th chapter of the book as he speaks of what he saw,

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the

stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered, to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a male child, (stress rests upon the fact that this was a male child -- male child [laughter] -- a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”

Reference, of course, to the Lord Jesus Christ. There the woman is Israel, and it is through the woman that the Lord Jesus is come through Israel.

Now that of course is, well all of you know this in this room, the promises of the Old Testament speak so plainly that it is from Israel that our Lord shall come, and Israel was chosen for that reason among these others, and finally Israel was chosen to carry the message to the nations of the earth. God never intended that his blessing should reside in Israel as if they alone were in view in the Messianic promises. All of those Messianic promises ultimately encompass the whole of the world, and of course, God is going to accomplish his program and through his program the world is going to come to Jesus Christ. Paul spells that out in detail in Romans chapter 9 and the Scriptures as a whole spell it out too. And it will come, the whole of the world, will come to God through Christ by virtue of the Israelitish response and evangelization of the world. So God chose Israel not for their genius for religion, but to be the depository of the divine revelation, to be the mother of the Savior and to carry the message of salvation to the nations. Isaiah expresses that in the Old Testament in chapter 43 verses 11 and 12 and 21.

The term, seed of Abraham, then, has several forces. It refers to the natural seed, the unsaved, natural seed of Abraham, for there were people who came from Abraham who were simply natural seed. You’ll remember in John chapter 8 and verse 33 the Jews claim to be seed of Abraham. They were seed of Abraham in the natural sense, and that

term is used of those who were seed of Abraham simply in the sense that they were the natural descendants of Abraham. They don’t inherit anything. The natural seed.

The term is also used of a natural and a spiritual seed. That is, natural descendants of Abraham who were also believers. That sense is found in Romans chapter 4 and verse 11, and Romans chapter 9 verses 6 through 8 in which it is said, Not all who are of Israel these are Israel. In other words, there are some Israelites who are not Israelites, but there are also some Israelites who are really Israelites. And it is possible to be seed of Abraham, even an Israelite and lost, but of course, it is God’s intention that a certain elect remnant of seed of Abraham of Israelites shall be seed of Abraham and Israelites both naturally and spiritually.

And then seed of Abraham is used in the sense of the spiritual seed, Gentiles who have believed in the Lord Jesus, and that sense is found in Galatians chapter 3 verses 6 through 9 where they are related to the universal promises. Will you turn over there for just a moment? Galatians chapter 3 verse 6 through verse 9. Galatians chapter 3 verse 6 through verse 9. Paul writes arguing that justification is by faith,

“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they who are of faith, the same are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached before the good news unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

There Gentiles are related to that promise in the clause, the last clause, chapter 12 verse 3 of the Book of Genesis. They are seed of Abraham, the Gentiles, when they believe in the Lord Jesus they belong to that statement, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Now we turn to the unconditional character of the Abrahamic Covenant, and we are turning to Genesis chapter 15 verses 7 through 21. Now I’m going to read these verses because it’s very important that you read these passages for yourself. Now you’ll remember that Abraham was given a promise that he was going to have a seed. And further, God has said to Abraham after the incident in Genesis 14, “Fear not Abram I’m thy shield and thy exceeding great reward,” and that reminds Abraham that he has had a promise for a seed of a seed but he has no seed. So he asks God about it. He said,

“The heir of my house is this Eleazar of Damascus can he be the seed?

And Abram said, Behold to me Thou hast given no seed and lo one born in my house is mine heir so you have said. Behold the word of the Lord came unto him saying, This shall not be thin heir but he that shall come forth out of thin own bowels (or loins) shall be thine heir (because in Jewish thought, a person could become a legal seed, a legal heir, and thus could be the legal seed, and so God by stating that he he’s going to come out of your loins or out of your bowels he just saying to Abram, no it’s not going to be a legal seed; it’s going to be someone who really is of you Abram) and he brought him forth abroad and said look now toward heaven and count the stars if thou be able to number them, and he said unto him so shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

By the way, today we often have in contemporary theology the statement that the Bible does not contain doctrines, but it contains truth about a person, and that if we tell people that they are to believe in propositions, we are turning them away from the personal nature of the faith of the New Testament.

Now going hand in hand with this is usually a de-emphasis upon these great doctrines of the faith, and you know me well enough to know that that just makes me as mad as a hornet. I want you to notice that right here in this statement we have propositional truth and personal truth. God took Abram out and he said look up in the heavens and see those stars and then he said, so shall thy seed be -- that's the proposition. And then we read And he believed in the Lord. That's the personal nature of the faith. And it was counted to him for righteousness. So we have both propositional truth and we have personal faith. These things should never be opposed. It's very personal for me to believe a particular doctrine.

Now of course, I'm just as much against as anyone a person who believes a kind of creed and it's not a real vital thing with him at all. In fact, you often see people like that. They have such a grasp of Bible doctrine, so they think. They are very hard and callous and unloving in their Christian life. Of course, it's possible for a person to be like that. But on the other hand, it's also possible for a person who talks so much about the personal side that he hasn't got any real structure of faith at all. What we need is both. We need the structure of the faith as set forth in the propositions of the word of God, and we need to hold these in a personal way. And if you don't hold them in a personal way, I suggest that you go home get down on your bedside by the side of your bed write out a few of these propositions which you think are so great and ask God to make them a real vital thing in your Christian life and experience that's a good way to begin.

Now I was at chapter 15 verse 7 and following wasn't I? You thought I'd forgotten didn't you? Well to tell you the truth I had. [Laughter] Verse 7. I want to read these verses. And he said unto him, I am the LORD who brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldes, or (Oor) of the Chaldes -- it's hard for me to get away from my childhood pronunciation of that -- Ur of the Chaldes, to give thee this land to inherit it. Now remember the Abrahamic promises have been given but now they are going to be confirmed by covenantal sacrifice.

“And he said, LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?
And he said unto him, Take me 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 unto him all these, and divided them
in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds
divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses,
Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep
sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.
And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a
sojourner in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall
afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall
serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.
And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good
old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come here again: for the
iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. (God is very patient and long-
suffering with the lost Amorites.) And it came to pass, that, when the sun
went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp
that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a
covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given (notice) have I
given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river
Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the
Hittites, and the Perizzites, (and the Fort Worthites) and the Rephaims, And
the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.
Excluding that addition to the text which is not found in your version.”

Now then this is a momentous chapter in the word of God for two reasons. Number one it is the chapter in which we have the justification by faith passage upon which Paul builds his doctrine verse 6. It is also a record of the fundamental covenant that God made with Israel in the person of Abraham. Sinai is not the fundamental covenant that God made in the Old Testament. Often people read the Old Testament and gain that impression, but in the epistle that Paul wrote to the Galatians, he points out that the fundamental covenant is the covenant promises that God gave to Abram, and that they are the promises that are before the time of the Sinaitic covenant, and also continue after the Sinaitic covenant has been done away with.

And of course this is the covenant that he states in the Old Testament is the basis and the reason for God bringing Israel out of the land of Egypt. It is stated in Exodus chapter 2 and verse 24 that it is by virtue of the Abrahamic Covenant that God moves in the midst of Israel and brings them out of the land of Egypt. And further, in the New Testament, it is stated that this is the covenant by reason of which he brings Jesus Christ into the world. So this is the fundamental covenant of the Old Testament of these historical covenants. The rest of the historical covenants give us certain details of this particular one.

Now we want to talk about its unconditional character and first the evidence from its confirmation in this chapter. There are two steps in the unfolding of the Abrahamic Covenant. In Genesis chapter 15 we have the inauguration of the covenant, or the confirmation of the covenant in the covenantal sacrifice. In Genesis chapter 17 we will have the sign of circumcision the sign of the covenant expanded. So we need these two chapters as well as Genesis 12 and 13 in order to get the whole picture of the revelation concerning the Abrahamic Covenant in the Book of Genesis.

Now in order to understand what happened when God took Abram, after Abram had believed in God, and confirmed the covenant, it’s necessary for us to understand some important things about the ancient ceremony that is set forth here. This ancient

ceremony which is set forth here in Genesis chapter 15 was often used for the confirmation of covenants. The manner of the confirmation of covenants was something like this. An animal was slain and divided into halves. The pieces were placed opposite each other at a convenient distance then the contracting parties passed between the pieces of the animals, and this symbolic act was supposed to represent their union in covenant. They were each promising that they would fulfill the conditions that were laid upon them to their death, for the death of the animals signified that.

Now you will find an allusion to this in the Old Testament in Jeremiah chapter 34, so I think you ought to turn over to it. Jeremiah chapter 34 and verse 18. Jeremiah chapter 34 and verse 18. Here we read, “And I will give the men who have transgressed my covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in two, and passed between those parts, (or these parts). So here we have an allusion to the practice of slaying an animal passing between the parts.

Now in secular history there is a very notable illustration of this in connection with the proceedings of the army of Alexander immediately after his death. When the time came to divide up the empire, something that may be transpiring in Saudi Arabia at the present time in some way or other, there arose a dispute concerning the succession between the horse guards and the remainder of the cavalry under Pirdecos who formed one party, and the infantry under Meleager, who formed the other party, and for a while the strife between these two parties was so great that it seemed as if the issue could only be decided by a battle, but finally they worked out a compromise and in order to covenant this compromise they took a dog, took the dog and cut the dog in half.

I don’t know what kind it was maybe it was just a poodle. Maybe it was a Great Dane, maybe it was a fox terrier -- I know I’m trying to touch all of your emotions now [laughter] -- but they cut the dog in two. They put one part of the dog over here and one

part of the dog over here, and the whole army marched between the pieces of the dogs in order to confirm the agreement that had been made.

In fact it is out of this custom that we have the terms for the making of a covenant in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In the Old Testament when you make a covenant, the term is *b’rith karath* or “to cut a covenant,” and in the New Testament it is *borkia themai*, “to cut oaths or to cut a covenant.” So that’s the way you spoke. If you were a Hebrew or a Greek, you didn’t say you didn’t say you made a covenant, you said you cut a covenant, and it arises out of this custom.

Now in response to the command of God, Abram obtained some animals in Genesis chapter 15. We read of these animals in the verses that follow. The Lord said to him Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took these animals and he divided them in the midst -- that is, he cut those big animals in two and he put a piece of the animal over here and a piece of the animal over here. It was a rather bloody kind of exercise to engage in. And since he had a turtledove and a young pigeon, and it’s reflected later on in the Mosaic ceremonies, because those animals are not divided later on in any ceremony, he evidently put a turtledove on one side and a pigeon on the other. He did not divide the birds. And we read, “And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.”

Now evidently Abram since this information was given him at night and since it was not until the next night that we read when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, that Abram remained there the whole day long waiting for something to happen, waiting in the midst of the pieces of the dead animal for God to do something. He had done what God had told him to do.

And so he sat around and waited and finally the next afternoon when the sun was going down, suddenly a kind of deep sleep fell upon him and lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. I gather that this was something like a nightmare that he was

having, and as he had this experience of the horror of great darkness, he heard a voice out of heaven that said Abram, “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a sojourner in a land that is not our theirs, and shall serve them; and shall afflict them four hundred years; And uh also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come here again: for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full.” And it came to pass, that, when the message was given when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp passed between those pieces.

So when the sun had gone down Abraham is there, this eerie sense of the luminous had fallen upon him and he saw moving toward the carcasses, in appearance and shape like a cylindrical furnace from which smoke was issuing, and a fiery flame streamed forth. It was the sign of God’s presence and of course is represented in later days as the Shekinah glory of God: the cloud that by day hovered over Israel and the fiery pillar at night. God was moving between those pieces.

And in this form of the fiery furnace by the way there is a suggestion in this mingling of darkness with the fact that there is a judgment upon sin because of the holiness of God, for Abram cannot be blessed if his sin is not paid for by a substitute, and that is signified by the darkness of this particular occasion and the fiery furnace which signifies the judgment upon sin. Now of course, all of this is ultimately fulfilled through the saving work of the Lord Jesus who in darkness cried out, My God my God why hast Thou forsaken me? This all looks forward to that great event.

Now then the important thing for you to note is this. That contrary to all of the other types of covenants which men make, in which both parties to the covenant move between the pieces, in this instance only God passed between the pieces of the animals, and Abram is not invited to follow. Why? Because this is an unconditional covenant and

it is God who in his infinite faithfulness guarantees that he will fulfill these promises that are set forth here.

Now that is of the greatest and most fundamental significance, and I’m amazed that some men whom I highly respect have not seen the force of this great fact. Arthur W. Pink, a good man, even a Calvinist, unfortunately doesn’t see that this covenant is an unconditional covenant, and he destroys his own position of grace by seeking to find some condition of obedience upon which he can rest the faithful covenant keeping God’s promises. Wouldn’t dare do that in connection with the gospel would you? Of course not.

Now see, I’ve waxed too eloquent over this point, only have about five minutes left. I want to try to state some of these other things that I have on my outline. The evidence of the confirmation testifies to the unconditional character of the Abrahamic Covenant. Second or B, the evidence of the stated conditions, and all I want to point out here was there are no conditions stated in the unfolding of the Abrahamic Covenant. No conditions are ever stated. This is an unconditional covenant.

Mr. Pink -- he knows better now -- but Mr. Pink, bless his heart, he said, “The reason that we probably do not have any reference to this is because the Old Testament counts are characterized by brevity. There are no conditions.” He later appeals to the fact that Abraham was obedient, but the fact that Abraham is obedient in sacrificing Isaac is no evidence that that is a condition of the covenant. My dear friend, the obedience of Abraham is the result of the covenant. It is the result of the gracious working of God -- not the condition of it.

Third, the evidence from Israel’s apostasy. Ahh. Now Israel apostatized in the Old Testament -- we all grant that, premillennialists and amillennialists alike -- we all can agree on that. Israel was apostate. However, the premillennialists affirm that Israel’s apostasy does not cancel the promises it only delays the fulfillment of them. The amillennialists contends that Israel’s apostasy cancels the covenant. I refer you to a

passage in Romans chapter 3 verses 1 through 4 in which Paul specifically answers that objection. He says, What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. The Messianic promises primarily.

For what if some did not believe? Doesn’t that cancel the Messianic promises if some do not believe? Shall their unbelief make void the faithfulness of God? What does Paul say? *Megonoito!* -- God forbid: perish the thought! Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. Apostasy does not nullify the promises it only delays their fulfillment. The evidence from the New Testament.

I think you ought to turn with me to a couple of passages here. I have two minutes. Can I do it in two minutes? That’s the question. I’ll just read a couple of texts. Luke chapter 1 verse 46 through verse 55. I want you merely to note that in the New Testament after Israel’s apostasy it is still affirmed that the Abrahamic Covenant is valid. Luke chapter 1 verse 46 through verse 55. I’ll only read verse 54 and 55 for the sake of time. It is the *magnificat* of Mary the mother of our Lord and she is praising God and extolling his grace saying, “He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.” She thought that covenant was still valid after Israel’s apostasy.

Acts chapter 3 Acts chapter 3 verse 17 through verse 26. The group of people in the tape office are getting real nervous now, but notice only the end of these verses, verse 23, “Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your from his iniquities.” And in the earlier part of it he says if you turn all these promises shall be fulfilled to you.

And the final text is Hebrews chapter 6 verse 13 through verse 18. We do not have time to read it. These arguments I think affirm beyond a shadow of a doubt that the claims of our amillennial brethren are false, and the Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant one that God shall fulfill. We shall look at their arguments in our next hour and continue our discussion of the Abrahamic Covenant, stressing particularly its relationship to us in the present time, then in our last study -- if I don't try to get too far away from my notes-- we'll deal with the future of the Abrahamic Covenant. Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the assurance that when Thou dost make a promise, Thou dost keep it, for Thou has promised to us, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. If it should be Lord that Thou shouldst not keep the promises which Thou hast made to Abram and to his seed, how should we know that Thou shouldst not fail in keeping the promises Thou has made to us individually? We thank Thee that Thou art a faithful God and Thou shalt yet demonstrate thyself to be totally faithful to the promises Thou hast made to Abram and to his seed.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.