



## God's Covenant with Israel

# The Abrahamic Covenant

Part Three

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**J**UST before noon on 21st January, 2013, Barack Hussein Obama II took the oath of Office at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, administered by US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, Jr. It was the 57th Presidential Inauguration ceremonial swearing-in of a US President.

Obama, now officially beginning his second presidential term, chose to take the oath on his wife's family Bible and concluded with the words not all incoming US Presidents have chosen to use: "So help me God".

Taking an oath is a serious and solemn duty – an act not to be entered upon lightly nor without due concern for the consequences, should it be disregarded or violated in any way.

In Genesis 22, it is not a man who made an oath, it is God Himself. Abraham did not initiate the proceedings, it was his sovereign LORD who subjected His covenant promises to him and his posterity to a divine oath. Because He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself:

*Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore, and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed My voice. (Gen. 22:15-18).*

The implications of this decree are clear and unequivocal: for as long as God lives (and that's forever!), His covenant with Abraham (and subsequently Israel), will stand secure – eternally! (Cf. Heb. 6:13-20; Ps. 105:7-11). Israel's Messiah would ultimately come, fulfilling His salvific role at His first Advent, and based on that redemptive, substitutionary, atoning mission, He would fulfil (in time) His Prophet, Priest and Kingly role at His Second Advent in establishing His Kingdom



President Barack Hussein Obama II takes the "Oath of Office" on his wife's family Bible Capitol Hill Washington, DC, USA – 21st January, 2013.

on earth, and then ruling sovereignly in the Eternal State forever. (Rev. 1, 4 & 5, 19ff; Cf. Heb. 1, 2, 12:25-29).

Furthermore, that this Abrahamic covenant was "subjected to divine oath" relative to Abraham on Mt. Moriah (Lit. – The LORD will see to it), speaks with even greater significance when we take into account that this same covenant was "confirmed to the Patriarchs", Isaac and Jacob, in Genesis 26:24-25 and 28:13-15.

Prophetically, Paul indicated just how significant this was in relation to the restoration of Israel in the last days. His four theological arguments in Romans 11 are presented as unequivocal evidence: God has not finished with Israel, nationally (Rom. 11:1-32, esp. verses 1[Personal], 2-10 [Historical], 11-16 [Dispensational] and 17-25ff [Theological]).

### I. The Context of The Oath

It was the saintly author, convention speaker and pastor, F. B. Meyer who pointed out in his character study of Abraham the significance of the opening words of Genesis 22 verse 1:

*Now it came to pass **after these things** that God tested Abraham ... (emphases added).*

God's greatest test for the "father of the faithful" came towards the end of his life's pilgrimage, not at its beginning! He had been called from his native Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 12:1-3), buried Terah in Haran (Gen. 11:32), experienced the spiritual and emotional highs and lows of God initiating the covenant promise (Gen. 15, especially verse 18), then the devastating consequences

of "trying to give God a hand" with Hagar and its sad aftermath (Gen. 16:1-16; 21:8-21). This was followed by God's gracious confirmation of the covenant with the two signs of the "land" and "circumcision" (Gen. 17:8-13ff) and the subsequent Christophany experience near "the terebinth trees of Mamre" (Gen. 18:1) to reveal that in actual fact, the son of promise (Isaac, meaning 'laughter') would be born to he and Sarah, in their old age (Gen. 21:1-3).

Moreover, Abraham had interceded for the depraved city of Sodom (Gen. 18:16-33; Cf. 19:1ff), sought to deceive king Abimelech (Gen. 20:1-18), and later entered into a covenant with him at Beersheba that he would “not deal falsely ... with (his) offspring, or with (his) posterity ...” (Gen. 21:22-34).

Abraham was now in his senior years. As God’s “friend” (2 Chron. 20:7, Is. 41:8, Js. 2:23), he’d walked with his LORD, not always as faithfully as he should have, so how would he fair in this, the greatest test of faith set before him – **“after these things”?** If the covenant that God had *promised* him, *initiated* for him and *confirmed* to him with the two signs was to be guaranteed to Abraham’s seed for perpetuity, it must be **“subjected to (divine) oath”** (Gen. 22:16-18). Associated with this, Abraham’s unflinching obedience would need to be tested. This is exactly what happened, as the gripping account of the “Mount Moriah” journey recorded, and God finally affirmed: *“Abraham, Abraham, ... do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him: for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me”* (Gen. 22:11-12, emphases added).

## II. The Content of The Oath

Let us notice here in this revealing context that certain essential truths are inherent in the text. For simplicity, we will identify them in the following categories: *spiritual, typical, prophetic, doctrinal and practical*. All of these principles challenge and encourage us as believers in our walk with the Lord today:

### A. Spiritual Truths:

- Observe, first of all, that “after these things” – all the experiences of life Abraham had been led through – God spoke to his “friend” by name and there was an immediate response in obedience. “Here I am”, he said (verse 1). Does that reflect our experience as we get older and further along the road in spiritual maturity in Christ?
- Abraham was told to take “(his) only son, Isaac, whom (he) loved” and offer him as a “sacrifice” in the land of Moriah. He was the son of promise, the only one in the messianic line who could fulfil God’s plan, purpose and promise (Gen. 12:2-3). Yet, the “father of the faithfuls” faith was undaunted once again. God had given

Isaac miraculously (Rom. 4:13-25) and He could just as miraculously “raise him up again” to prove His faithfulness, yet again (Heb. 11:19). Do we appropriate all the promises of God to us in Christ Jesus? (2 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 1:3)? At this point, Abraham did!

- Abraham’s immediate obedience to the LORD is seen in his “rising up early in the morning, (saddling) his donkey, (taking) two of his servants and Isaac, (splitting) the wood and going where He was told to go” (verse 3). Does this not remind us of Mary’s words at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee? – “whatever He says to you do it” (Jn. 2:5). We can never say Peter’s remonstrating words “Not so, Lord” (cf. Acts 10:14) in the same breath! There is no option: it is either “not so!” or “Lord!”. We must choose Him over all personal choices that deny His Lordship over our lives!
- It was “on the third day” that Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. Trace this phrase (or “after the third day”) through Scripture and you will find that this expression is consistently associated with “life coming through death” (Cf. For example, Gen. 1:9-13; Josh. 3:2ff; Lk. 2:46; Mt. 27:62-62; 1 Cor. 15:2-3). Are we experiencing His victory daily as we are identified with Him “in the likeness of His death”? (Rom. 6:3, 11, 13). Victorious living involves victorious dying (to self), as Galatians 2:20; 3:9-11 and Eph. 4:22-24ff reveal.
- Abraham’s faith was verbally expressed to his accompanying servants: “... we will come back to you” (emphasis added). As C. H Spurgeon commented relative to Habakkuk 2:3-4, “faith always announces her intentions!”. Are we really men and women of faith who live by God’s unfailing promises, when it is all said and done? Without that we will never please Him. (Heb. 11:6)
- Abraham’s reply to Isaac that “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering” in verse 8 (cf. vs. 13a) teaches the wonderful doctrinal truth of ‘substitutionary atonement’. The progressive revelation of God about the “central message of the Bible” (so J. Sidlow Baxter), is all about “The Lamb” – the Messiah! He’s depicted as the Lamb

on the altar in the Old Testament, the Lamb on the Cross in the gospels and the Lamb on the Throne in Revelation. The Lamb, Lord Jesus Christ, is “all the glory in Immanuel’s land”. Do we glorify Him consistently in all we do and say (1 Cor. 10:31-33)?

- Abraham was committed to the LORD even more than doing His will, for had it not been so, he would have gone ahead and sacrificed his son. When the Angel of the LORD called his name again – even as the knife was raised to inflict that mortal blow – His obedient servant was in a sensitive relationship with Him, and he responded instantly: “Here I am” (verse 11b). Finding the reality of “Jehovah Jireh” (the LORD will provide – vs. 14) is the outflow result of an on-going, close relationship with God, not just a blind resolution to do His will in some haphazard way. Remember the Corinthian believers and their failure to give their gifts? (2 Cor. 8:10-11ff). Are you as close to the Lord today, as you were last week/month/year? If not, guess who moved?

**B. Typical Truths** – These are set forth in the accompanying diagram

### C. Prophetic Truths

Three aspects of prophetic truth may be discerned in the biblical text presently being studied: (1) The significance of Mt. Moriah (vss. 2, 14); (2) the reality and necessity of God’s provision of His own substitutionary sacrifice (vs. 8); and, the further revelation as to Whom this God-provided sacrifice pointed, prophetically. It was the Lamb of God!

Firstly then, notice that Abraham was instructed to go “to the land of Moriah” (vs. 2). In verse 14, Abraham further specifies the

**Typical Observations & Lessons**

**[Foreshadowed] TYPE (Isaac)**

- Promised Son – Gen. 18:10-14
- Pleased the Father – Gen. 22:2ff
- Born miraculously – Gen. 21:1-2
- Born at a “set” time – Gen. 18:21
- Willing obedience “to death” – Gen. 22:9-10

Major Differences: (1) Isaac “questioned” (Gen. 22:11) (2) Abraham returned to his waiting servants (Gen. 22:11) until we see him “receiving” his bride (Gen. 24:62ff). J.

area as “in the mountain of the LORD it shall be provided”. The term connotes ‘seeing’, ‘(making) provision’ and is to be understood as being associated with divine providence. Link this with the proto evangelium promise of Genesis 3:15 and subsequent messianic promises in the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament), and the prophetic picture becomes plain: God is all about providing for lost man’s sinful state since the Fall – the gracious offer of reconciliation to Himself through a “substitute” of His own provision.

This is elaborated upon in the second consideration just mentioned: “God (would) provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering ...” (vs. 8). The Hebrew text here underscores the thought of ‘reflexive reciprocity’. That is, God Himself would initiate the provision of the sacrificial lamb, but in so

doing, something even more significant would be achieved in the process. It would be ‘for Himself!’ In other words, His ‘sacrificial lamb’ provision would also be the means of fully meeting the spiritual and moral bankruptcy of the person who comes before God to offer the sacrifice. Later in God’s unfolding revelation, we will

learn this is as ‘propitiation’ – the removal of (God’s) wrath by the offering of a gift. (See Rom. 3:24; 1 Jn. 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:21 and cf. Ps. 7:11 and 52:3-4). Count Nicolas von Zinzendorf expressed it this way:

***Jesus Thy blood and righteousness,  
My beauty are – Thy glorious dress.  
‘Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.***

The third prophetic aspect is indissolubly connected to the first and second aspects just cited. God’s unfolding drama of redemption reveals Him as the Lamb of God. Notice the sequence: a lamb for an individual in Genesis 4; a lamb for a family in Exodus 12; the Lamb for a nation in Isaiah 53 and also for the world in Jn. 1:29!

Do you know Him personally? He’s Israel’s Messiah – “Yeshua” (Jesus), the Lord Jesus Christ!

#### **D. Theological Truths**

Again, at least two identifiable theological aspects are apparent to the discerning reader of Genesis 22. Consider the following:

- The coupling together of “faith and works” in Scripture. One could no better than to cite the illustrative truth set forth in James’ purposive argument in his book (Js. 2:14-26). There, the (half) brother of our Lord, showed that Abraham’s Mt. Moriah experience saw “faith and works” inextricably joined. However, when he states that it was by this that Abraham “was justified”, it is to be understood in the sense of his being “justified” before men – not God. Jesus Christ’s death on the Cross is the only means of “justification” before God. (Cf. Rom. 3-4f). Luther’s theology was correct at this point, but his misunderstanding of James’ book made him designate his epistle as “a right, strawy epistle”.
- Rightly understood, this scriptural truth as to the indissoluble union between “faith and works” should always be evidenced in a believer’s life. Again, James point is clear, and has its parallels in the epistles of Paul. (See 1-11 Corinthians; Eph. 4: 1-2, 17; 5:2, 8, 13ff; Gal. 5:16, 25 etc). That this does not always happen in the daily walk of believers should not detract us from what God expects in our walk of experiential (as against positional) sanctification. To put it plainly: the proof of “saving faith” is an obedient, godly life! (Rom. 4:1-5; Gal. 3:6ff; cf. Mt. 5:16f, Eph. 2:8-9, 10). Jewish or gentile fellow-traveller, how are you measuring up in this regard, right now?

#### **E. Practical Truths**

As with all scriptural truth, biblical doctrine is always allied to Christian duty. God is very practical, and this is again clearly seen in the passage under review. Permit the writer to set forth three practical lessons we all can, and must, apply:

First, the obvious observation: true faith in the Lord will always be tested. The test here for Abraham was essentially one of his heart’s devotion to the Lord. This becomes apparent in God’s answer to him in verse

12: “... for now I know that you fear (Me) ...”. God brooks no rivals, and He countenances no idols! Are our lives totally free from anything, or anyone who has laid claim to priority in our hearts? Put everything on the altar for Him. That’s the way of blessing!

Secondly, Abraham rested fully in God’s promises, as Hebrews 11:17-19 confirms. The One who miraculously gave Isaac, is the same One who would do so again in resurrection, had the sacrifice of “his only son” actually taken place. That’s why we can fully trust Him to fulfil all His promises to us in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20).

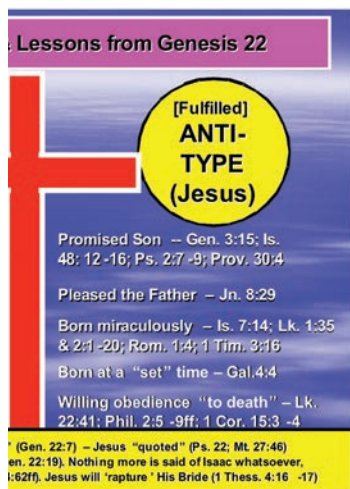
Thirdly, God always ‘comes through’ exactly ‘on time’. In doing so, He graciously supplies our every need. Genesis 22:8, 18 are the explicit testimonies to His divine provision – at the right time! We do well to apply the parallel principles of Hebrews 4:16 and Philippians 4:19 in this context. The LORD is “Jehoveh Jireh”, the ample Provider for all we may need on the pilgrimage journey. Let’s trust Him and go through with Him to do “whatever, whenever, wherever” as His dedicated disciples, no matter what the cost. (Lk. 9:23, 56-62; 14:25-33).

#### **III. The Challenge of The Oath**

It may appear surprising to some who read this article on the Abrahamic covenant being “subjected to divine oath” should be designated as a ‘challenge’. Why is it so? Is the title justified? The writer believes that it is, for the following reasons:

First, we have noted that this covenant was later “confirmed to the Patriarchs”, Isaac and Jacob in Genesis 26:24-25 and 28:13-15. The blessing of God’s covenant with Abraham was passed on to the subsequent “chosen seed” of his descendants, and then to Jacob’s “twelve sons”, the progenitors of the “twelve tribes”, the Hebrews, who in turn were known as the nation of Israel.

That God would continue to work out His messianic plan of redemption through His sovereignly chosen nation, Israel (Dt. 7:6-8; 2 Sam. 7:23-24; Is. 43:1ff), is abundantly evident throughout the record of Israel’s history in the Old Testament. Israel was to be “a witness to the nations” (Is. 43:10). Moreover, through her Messiah even gentiles would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; Isaiah 45:22; Gal. 3:13-14). No wonder the need for God to subject His promise to Abraham to an oath. It was (and is) established for



His people's sake, and for the sake of all nations this divine promise of perpetuity is now assured (See. Ps. 105:7-11; Rom. 9-11, esp. 9:4-5, and chapter 11:29 relative to Israel and Rom. 11:12-16ff relative to the gentiles being blessed).

This thesis presents a *challenge* to those who espouse the view that God is finished with Israel and will have no further dealings with her as a nation. Their reasoning is that since the Jewish people have rejected their promised Messiah, God has rejected them. This present writer rejects this position for the following reasons:

(1) The on-going reality of God's covenant with Abraham (and through his descendants, Israel) is assured for it is an "everlasting" covenant (Ps. 105:7-11; cf. Gen. 17:7-8, 13; 2 Sam. 7:24), even in light of the "new covenant" promise to **Israel** in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Ex. 19:1-5 and chapters 20-24; Heb. 8:7-13).

(2) God's 'chesed' (covenant-love, steadfast love, unconditional love) will see to it.

(3) The promises of God to Israel, *per se*, replete in the Tenach (Old Testament), demand it.

(4) Matthew chapters 24-25 refer primarily to Israel, and only the church by way of secondary application.

(5) Paul's arguments in Romans 9, 10 and 11, when taken in the total context of his epistle, deal unequivocally with Israel.

(6) Of the 73 occasions where Israel is mentioned in the New Testament, all refer to Israel, or the Israelites in relation to their ethnicity as a nation (cf. Rom. 8:28f) – even Galatians 6:16, which should be translated "... *and* the Israel of God", not as the NIV has it: "even ...". Paul is here speaking of *believing Jews*, as against the Judaizers and gentile believers (see Gal. 5:13-16ff).

(7) The doctrine of the coming Kingdom for which prayer is to be made (Mt.6:6ff) and which Christ will present to the Father (1 Cor. 15:22-23) is to be distinguished from all the other aspects of the kingdom found in Scripture.

The stark challenge of Genesis 22:15-18 (as it relates ultimately to Israel) is thrown into even more confronting relief when

it is seen as part of God's special dealings with His people through whom Messiah would come.

Try this simple exercise that was shared with the present writer recently by his good friend and colleague, Geoff Smith, from Auckland, New Zealand:

- Take your Bible and place your left index finger on Genesis 12:1-3.
- Now open the Scriptures to Acts 2 and place the right index finger on that passage.
- Have a long look at the bulk of God's revelation between your two hands, and ask this question: About whom does this vast volume of Scripture speak? Think carefully before you answer! *It is essentially **about ISRAEL!!!*** – not you, this writer or anyone else! Yes, it is *for* you, *for* this writer and *for* "whomsoever" by virtue of the promised Jewish Messiah, but it is not fundamentally *about* you at all!

So go ahead – praise the Lord for His redemptive plan, His salvation purpose and His prophetic programme, as revealed in Scripture. They all focus on, and culminate in Israel's Messiah, with Israel herself occupying centre stage throughout the whole divine revelation!

If you are Jewish, trust "Yeshua" (Jesus) as your Saviour and Lord. If you are gentile, do the same thing and thank Him along with the Syro-Phoenician women who wouldn't take "no" for an answer as her daughter was demon possessed. Remember the story in Mark 7: 24-30? In response to Jesus' going out of His country to the gentile region of Tyre and making reference to his compatriots in terms of "the children being filled (with bread) first", she responded appropriately: "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs".

Do you see the centrality of Israel in God's economy of dealing with a sinful, rebellious world? Gentiles, by God's redeeming grace, can show their faith in Jesus too, and all their needs can be met in Him for believing Jews and believing Gentiles in this present Age are "one new man" in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2-3).

Isn't that a startling and sufficient reason to give thanks God for His "subjecting the Abrahamic covenant to oath"? It surely is!

## Conclusion

Unlike President Obama taking his oath of Office on his wife's family Bible, and avowing publicly for whatever reason, "so help me God", Genesis 22:15-18 reveals a covenant-making God, "subjecting His promises to oath" to a lost world in terms of His "friend" and his descendants being the vehicle by whom the coming Jewish Messiah would come, die, be buried, and rise again for the salvation of the whole world, if they would but believe in faith!

Remember, "... *whosoever* will may come" (Rom. 10:13). Believe in Him and you will be saved ... and your household! (Acts 16:30-31).



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