

## Chapter 3

# The Foundation Covenants



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### **ABRAM/ABRAHAM--Father of Many Nations**

God's third major covenant was with a Caldean man named Abram. God sought out Abram just as He had both Adam and Noah. All three men had the choice to respond positively or negatively to His voice. Before his rebellion Adam indeed invited God's company and leading, afterward he tried to hide himself. Noah and Abram both chose to come closer when God called to them. After Abram followed God's instructions to leave his own people and be directed where to live, God spoke to him again and revealed to him part of His secret plan to redeem mankind from their foolishness in rejecting Him and turning away to obey false gods that they had begun to worship again after the worldwide flood. The more Abram followed God's will, the more he prospered and one day God introduced a verbal contract with him that would culminate in the birth of a single human baby--God's Son, born of a human mother and a supernatural father.

### **God Made a Promise to Abram**

*"The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.'*

*But Abram said, 'Lord God, what will You give Me seeing I go childless and the heir of my house is Eliezar of Damascus?' Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed, a servant born in my house is my Heir!'*

*And behold, the word of the Lord came to him saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.'*

*Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven and count*

*the stars in the sky if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be,' and he believed in the Lord and it was accounted to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:1-5)*

Abram was seventy-five years old when He followed the Lord's directions. He had to maintain his faith in God's promise during twenty five years for a son from his wife. In the meantime Sarai tried to make the prophesy happen, reasoning with human intellect that since she was barren and also too old to bear children, that her maid was the woman to have Abram's son and engineered a surrogate union between them. Like every action that anyone decides to do when they become impatient for God to fulfill His promises the outcome was to result in consequences that would split, not bond, the people involved in some way, both from God's perfect will as well as from each other. This division has spread and strengthened and the two factions have been at war with each other up until today. Even numerous human attempts throughout centuries to resolve the friction that divides these two groups have failed because only God can work through the heart and dissolve the conflict.

### **God Assured Abram by Partaking in a Covenant Ceremony**

Abraham was familiar with the idea of burnt offerings and the significance of blood sacrifice. In fact, God confirmed His covenant with Abram by instigating a tangible ceremony in which He literally took part.

*"(God) said to him, 'I am the Who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to inherit it.'*

*And he said, 'Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?'*

*So He said to him, 'Bring Me a three year old heifer, a three year old female goat, a three year old ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon.'*

*Then he brought all these things to Him, cut them in two down the middle and placed each piece opposite the other. But, he did not cut the birds in two and when the vultures came down on the carcasses Abram drove them away.*

*Now when the sun was going down a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.*

*Then He said to Abram, 'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs and will serve them and they will afflict them four hundred years and also the nation whom they serve I will judge. Afterward, they shall come out with great possessions...'*

*And it came to pass when the sun went down and it was dark, that, behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram." (Genesis 15:6-18)*

Initially Abram was skeptical of what God was promising him, for only a miracle would allow a very old man and barren old woman had to have a child. Evidently they had tried in the past when they both were young, but she had never gotten pregnant, let alone carry a child to term and give birth. Therefore, if Abram and his wife had been

unable to conceive in their prime it seemed ludicrous for them to have a baby when God spoke to them at that moment. Abram even seemingly scolded God, for to him, this inability had been God's fault. Abram likewise criticized God for allowing a servant, not even a blood relation to him, be his heir.

God told Abram that he indeed would father a child. Then he directed him to go outside, look at the stars, and attempt to count them. This demonstration somehow persuaded Abram to believe in the unseen and it sparked his belief in the possible promised future. The Bible says that this faith was what God judged to be virtue.

To increase and firmly establish Abram's faith, God then initiated a sort of binding contract between them--a tangible covenant ritual. He had Abram prepare several animals to offer their blood, which must have required enough effort, so that Abram had plenty of time to reflect on the importance and value of the ceremony. He had to round up the necessary animals, prepare them by splitting them in half and placing them in accordance with tradition, as well as keep any scavengers at bay until it was the appropriate time to begin. When everything had been prepared, God caused Abram to fall asleep and spoke to Him again about the future. This time, however, it was not about Abram, but his descendants, the Israelites. Without going into much detail, God told him about the enslavement of His people by the Egyptians, which as we will show did come to pass.

When Abram awoke, He saw a wondrous sight; a smoking cloud and a torch passed through the sacrificial animal's blood, which by that time must have been quite spread out. This was the same form that God used to guide the Israelites away from slavery into the land He had promised them. (*Exodus 13:21-22; 33:9-11*) As He told Moses when he wanted to see His true appearance, 'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live.' God had to adopt this facade until He could regain His once intimate relationship with humanity.

### **Abram's Doubt and Impatience**

*"Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children and she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.*

*So Sarai said to Abram, 'See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid. Perhaps I shall obtain children by her.*

*And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt two years in the land of Canaan. So he went to Hagar and she conceived, and when she saw that she had conceived her mistress became despised in her eyes.*

*Then Sarai said to Abram, 'My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace and when she saw that she had conceived I became despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me.'*

*So Abram said to Sarai, 'Indeed your maid is in your hand. Do as you please.'*

*And when Sarai dealt harshly with her she fled from her presence. Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur and he said, 'Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?'*

*She said, 'I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress, Sarai.'*

*The Angel of the Lord said to her, 'Return to your mistress and submit yourself under her hand.'*

*Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, 'I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.'*

*And the Angel of the Lord said to her, 'Behold, you are with child and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man and every man's hand against him. And, he shall dwell in the presence of the brethren.'" (Genesis 16:1-12)*

Sarai did not consider herself to be included in God's covenant with Abram. She was not present, nor was her name even mentioned in their ceremony. However, she evidently believed in God's promise that Abram would have children. Sarai used her carnal mind to rationalize how this ever would take place. Plus, she not only had been barren in her prime, she definitely could not get pregnant at her present stage of life. Therefore, Sarai assumed that her husband would have to lie with another woman. She had a maidservant who could bear children, so Sarai sent her to Abram. He did not have to yield to his wife's idea yet he did. Like Adam before him, he freely chose to follow his wife's wishes without even asking God about the matter.

When Hagar conceived, Sarai became so jealous of the other woman that she began to mistreat her. However, Hagar's son with Abram was not the baby that God had intended to initiate His covenant resulting in the future birth of His Own Son. God made a separate covenant with her child, and Ishmael's line became the Arab nations.

### **God Added His Name to Abram's**

*"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said to him, 'I am almighty God. Walk before Me and be blameless and I will make My Covenant between Me and you and will multiply you exceedingly.'*

*Then Abram fell on his face and God talked with him saying, 'As for Me, My Covenant is with you and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be Abram but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and, I will make nations of you and kings shall come from you. And, I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations to be an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also, I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.'*

*And God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised, and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised--every male child in your generations, he who is born in your*

*house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendants.*

*'He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised. And, My covenant shall be in your flesh, for an everlasting covenant. And, the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people. He has broken My commandment.*

*Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And, I will bless her and also give you a son by her.... Sarah your wife shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him.'* (Genesis 17:1-22)

God previously told Abram that his descendants eventually would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and that he would make him the father of *many* nations. As part of His covenant God later added His name to Abram's, like one spouse takes on the name of the other in a marriage to signify their union. Thus, Abram became Abra-ha-am--God's name in his language being pronounced as [Ha] (with a guttural 'X' sound). God not only went through a tangible ceremony with Abram so that He could understand the solemnity and commitment of their blood covenant He added His Own Name to Abram's, and later to Sarai's, making her from then on Sara-ha.

God not only covenanted Himself to Abraham, He promised that their union would pass from one generation to the following ones. Thus, whatever He promised to do for Abraham, He likewise promised to his son Isaac and their descendants, forever. At the beginning the pact principally included the Israelites, or Jews. However, the blood sacrifice of God's Son Jesus of Nazareth embraced every person no matter who were his or her ancestors, Jewish or not. God's sign to remind men of His covenant with them before the birth of His Son was a physical acceptance, shown on their bodies. Since the resurrection of His Son Jesus, circumcision is a spiritual acceptance of Them our minds and hearts called being born again.

*"They are all not Israel who are of Israel. Nor, are they children because they are the seed of Abraham; but 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who are children of the flesh these are not the children of God. But, the children of the Promise are counted as the seed."* (Romans 9:6b-8)

*"Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the Law but those who are of the faith of Abraham--who is the father of us all--(as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations') in the presence of Him Whom he believed--God, Who gives Life to the Dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did. Who, contrary to hope in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.*

*And, not being weak in faith, he did not (even) consider his own body already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith giving glory to God and being fully convinced that*

*what He had promised He also able to perform. And therefore, 'it was accounted to him as righteousness,'*

*Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him Who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." (Romans 4:16-24)*

### **Abraham's Son of Promise**

*"The Lord appeared to (Abraham) by the terebinth trees of Mamre as he was sitting in the tent door at the heat of day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold three men were standing by him.*

*And when he saw them he ran from the tent door to meet them, and he bowed himself to the ground and said, 'My Lord, I have now found favor in Your sight. Do not pass by Your servant. Please, let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. And', I will bring a morsel of bread that you may refresh your hearts. After that, you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.'*

*They said, 'Do as you have said.'*

*So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, 'Quickly! Make ready three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes.'*

*And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them. And, he stood by them under the tree while they ate.*

*Then they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?'*

*So he said, 'Here, in the tent.'*

*And He said, 'I will certainly return to you according to the time of life and behold Sarah your wife will have a son.'*

*(Sarah was listening in the tent door behind him.)*

*Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my Lord, being old also?'*

*And the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child since I am old?' Is there anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.'*

*But Sarah denied it, saying, 'I did not laugh,' for she was afraid.*

*And He said, 'No, but you did laugh.'" (Genesis 18:1-15)*

*"The Lord visited Sarah as He had said. And, the Lord did for Sarah what He had spoke,n for Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the setting time of which God had spoken to him. (Galatians 4:4a- the fullness of time) And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah had born to him, Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him." (Genesis 21:1-8)*

God finally came to Abraham to tell him that his wife, Sarah was the woman to bear him the child whose descendants would eventually make Abraham the "father of many nations". Sarah eavesdropped on their conversation and started to laugh at the idea. She did find it appealing, however, and it began to grow in her until she could accept it as coming true. When that time came, when her faith in God and His words had developed enough, He was able to make His promise a tangible reality. She conceived a son and they called him Isaac, the translation being "Laughter". Abraham obeyed God's commands and circumcised their son exactly as required to endorse their covenant with each other.

### **God Asked Abraham to Sacrifice His Son**

*"It came to pass that after these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham.'*

*And he said to Him, 'Here I am.'*

*Then He said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac whom you love ... and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall tell you.'*

*So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac. And, he split the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.*

*And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey. The lad and I will go yonder and worship and we will come back to you.'*

*So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took the fire in his hand and a knife. And the two of them went together.*

*But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father?'*

*And he said, 'Here I am, my son.'*

*Then he said, 'Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'*

*And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.'*

*So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him and Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order. And he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar upon the wood.*

*And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son but the angel of the Lord called to him and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!'*

*So he said, 'Here I am.'*

*And (God) said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him for now I know you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.' (John 3:16)*

*Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked and there behind him there was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So, Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son and Abraham called the place The-Lord-Will-Provide (in Hebrew, YHWH) as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided'.*

*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--blessing I will bless you. And, multiplying I will multiply you as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore, and your descendants will possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed shall all the nations of the world be blessed because you have heard My voice.'" (Genesis 22:1-18)*

Just as Noah did by building the ark to God's specifications, Abraham traveled precisely to where God had directed him to worship, even though it was a three day journey from his home. He did not argue that it would be much more convenient, as well as far less costly and troublesome, for him to sacrifice and worship where he lived. Instead, Abraham trusted that God had a purpose in directing him to go where He had, even if his human mind could not fathom the reasons. Even after having to wait fifteen years to see the son that God had promised and another several to watch him grow and love him as an individual, Abraham did not even flinch at the idea of offering the child that God had given back to Him. Although he may have been in agony emotionally Abraham was willing to give the Lord the one thing he most held dearest to his heart--his only son.

Isaac, too, evidently was just as devoted to and respectful of his father, Abraham, as Abraham was to his Father, God. Isaac was far younger and most likely faster and stronger than a man who was well over 100 years in age when this story took place. Therefore, Isaac easily could have run away from or overpowered a man who tied him up and put him on an altar to be burned, yet he did neither. He lay submissively enough even when he saw Abraham draw the knife to sacrifice him to God that the Lord's angel had to call out to Abraham twice to get his attention to stop him from killing his child.

Exactly as Abraham had told Isaac when questioned where the animal was that God wanted as a sacrifice, God did provide it. Abraham did not even have to search for nor capture it, for it was caught right behind him on a bush. Abraham either wanted not to alarm Isaac, or else he already had the faith to believe that the Lord would do something miraculous on the mountain--even raise up a dead son from the altar--because he told his servants that, 'we will come back to you'.

Since God had initiated and gone through a binding covenant with Abraham, even adding His name to his, whatever one was willing to do the other had to be willing to reciprocate in turn. God stated that Abraham was agreeable to sacrifice his son to God, therefore God had to be willing to return the gesture, which He did through Jesus of Nazareth.

*"For, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)*

*"For, by that one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." (Hebrews 10:14)*