

"THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT", Key to the Plan of God and Basis for Jewish Identity

by Mottel Baleston

Is there a single Biblical Principle which summarizes the Plan of God? Yes there is, and it also is the basis for Jewish identity. In recent years throughout the Movement of Jewish people coming to faith in Jesus, there has been much discussion regarding the basis for Jewish identity. Believers in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds have felt the desire to strongly identify with the larger Jewish community, and to be accepted by that larger Jewish community. These feelings are normal and understandable, as we see the Scriptures giving many examples of the positive benefit of standing in solidarity with the Jewish people.

For Gentile believers, we have the famous example of Ruth as she declared:

"Your People shall be my People, and your God shall be my God"

These believers have embraced the very words of Messiah as he stated: "Salvation is of the Jews" John 4:22

In their desire to identify with the Jewish people, Gentile believers in Messiah have turned to various sources of authority as to what constitutes "Jewish". Some are active in good, healthy Messianic Jewish Congregations where they are full, valued members of the community. Others have formed "new winds of doctrine" that somehow identifies Gentile believers as members of one of the Tribes of Israel, exactly which tribe seems to change every few years ! Other Gentile believers look to the mainstream Rabbinic Jewish community for their sense of "what is Jewish", and grant them authority in these matters.

For Jewish believers, there is a strong imperative to remain identifiable as Jews. After all, if God created us as Jews surely He knew what He was doing! If we walk away from our identity as Jews it is as if we were to tell God we reject His work in us. Through the years we've seen Satan's attempts to destroy the Jewish people, and so we are more determined than ever to say: "AM YISRAEL CHAI" THE JEWISH PEOPLE LIVE ON!

We are proud of our Jewish identity !! As we resolve to be identifiable as Jewish believers in Messiah Yeshua, we still come face to face with the question of the basis of Jewish identity and authority. Some Jewish believers do all they can to make themselves acceptable to mainstream Rabbinic Judaism, believing that if they just wear Tzitsit, keep Kosher and follow other forms of Rabbinic Halacha, they will eventually be accepted as a branch of Judaism. Even though some Rabbi's have begrudgingly allowed that Jewish believers are still Jews, we are still seen as being ignorant traitors who need to renounce Yeshua and return to Rabbinic Judaism. Sadly, some Jewish believers who have become completely enamored of Rabbinic approval have eventually done just that, backing away from central teachings of the Messiah in order to make themselves acceptable to Rabbinic Judaism.

All of this goes to the heart of the question, What is the Basis for Jewish identity? We hereby submit that the Lord God of Israel Himself has set the standard for Jewish identity. When God called Avraham Avinu (Abraham our Father) to be the first "Hebrew", He made a covenant with him and his descendants Isaac & Jacob which clearly outlines the true basis for Jewish identity. That sacred Covenantal Promise is known as the "Abrahamic Covenant". This Covenant is much older than the 'Mosaic Covenant" and is actually the written form of the statement and promise of God whereby He creates the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, starting with Avraham. (The Bible largely uses the terms "Israel" and "Jewish" interchangeably, they're the same people in spite of what some "new

winds of doctrine" might teach)

Here are seven main features which identify the Abrahamic Covenant as 'THE' Statement that God uses to establish His foundation of Jewish identity and authority:

1. The Abrahamic Covenant is the set of unconditional, unbreakable, eternal promises God made to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob that begins His relationship with the Jewish people. It's found in Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-21, 17:1-21.

Here's a 'trick question'; "Was Avraham Jewish or Gentile?". Correct answer: "Neither". You see, Abraham was the first Jewish person because God decreed that it was so. "Gentiles" are not a race of people, it is simply a term for those who are not Jewish. So, you only have Gentiles once you have Jews. The set of scriptures in Genesis where God speaks His eternal promises to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, bringing into existence the Jewish people, form what we might think of as a 'legal incorporation' of the Nation of Israel. The Covenant was 'unconditional', in that no conditions of obedience were required from the Jewish people for it to continue in full force. This Covenant continues to be cited throughout the entire Bible as the basis for God's relationship with Israel. While Abraham had a number of children, the Covenant line ran through Isaac alone. In the same way, the line was through only one of Isaac's sons, Jacob, and not through Esau (Gen 28:13-15, First Chron. 16:17). Jacob had 12 sons, and the Biblical definition of a Jew is a person who is a biological descendant of one of those 12 sons. While the Hebrew Scriptures encouraged Gentiles to forsake paganism and turn to the God of Israel in faith, those "God-fearers" or Proselytes are not called Jews, and they did not become Jews, even though they had an honored position in the Community of Israel. In the same way today, Gentiles who place their faith in Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel, do NOT become "Spiritual Jews" (a Replacement Theology invention), instead they are "Spiritual Gentiles", (Gentiles in whom the Holy Spirit resides) and should have a co-equal place of status in a healthy Messianic Congregation alongside the "Spiritual Jews" (Ethnic Jews in whom the Holy Spirit resides). The Gentile believers DO become co-heirs of SPIRITUAL Blessings from the Abrahamic Covenant (Galatians 3:14, 29), and are direct beneficiaries and recipients of those blessings. The Scriptures which support all this and bear witness to the distinction are Romans 2:17 & 29, which teaches that the true Jew is the one is BOTH Jewish Physically (v. 17) and has the Circumcision of the heart (v. 29), and Galatians 3:28 which teaches that there is one way of atonement for all, Jew & Gentile, Male & Female, even though these physical distinctions, i.e., male & female remain within the Body of Messiah.

2. The Abrahamic Covenant establishes a unique bond between Israel and God

When Isaiah 49:16 says "Behold I have engraved you on the palms of my hands", his immediate hearers were a Jewish nation that had broken the Mosaic Law as Isaiah so dramatically testifies to (Isa. 1:1-4), and were not entitled to the blessing of God (Leviticus 26:14-39) as far as the Mosaic Covenant was concerned. Yet, in the next few verses (Lev. 26:40-42) God does promise to bless them, NOT because of any obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, but rather because of His relationship to them through the ABRAHAMIC COVENANT. It is the Covenant to Abraham that secures the unique bond between God & Israel, NOT the Mosaic Covenant, as the foregoing scriptures show. If this fact alone were understood by believers, we would see far less confusion in some sectors of our Messianic movement.

3. The Abrahamic Covenant promises God's protection for the Jewish people. Gen. 12:1-3.

Back in my old neighborhood in Brooklyn, there used to be what was known as a "Protection Policy". If you thought you were going to be 'bothered' by the 'bad guys', you made a deal with even 'badder guys' to watch your back. Anyone who dared 'touch' you, was in turn 'touched' by your new friends. Well, God knew that lots of 'bad guys' would try to "rub out" (forgive my Brooklynese) the

Jewish people. Satan would move nation after nation to try to destroy the Jewish people. Why ?? Because it would be through the Jewish people that God would bring the Scriptures and the Messiah, two things that Satan really hates, but can't fight directly. So, God promised His protection of the Jewish people by saying that He would bless those that bless them, and curse those who curse them. A study of history confirms this pattern.

4. The Abrahamic Covenant grants ownership of the Land of Israel to the Jewish People.

Gen. 15:18-21, 17:8

While there is much controversy among the nations of the world regarding ownership of the Land of Israel, the Scriptures above are very clear. The entire Land of Israel, including even more territory than the current State of Israel encompasses, is given to the Jewish Nation by God. Its capital was, is, and shall always be Jerusalem. At the same time, God does have a concern for the descendants of Abraham through Hagar, Ishmael and his Arab offspring. To them God gives the land EAST of the land he gives to the Nation of Israel, as is clearly seen in Genesis 16:7-16. The Arab nations currently have that land promised to them, unfortunately, some among them also seek to unlawfully take Jewish land away from the Jewish people. (Current Arab land holdings are over 20 times the size of Israel !)

5. The Abrahamic Covenant remains in effect even though the Mosaic Covenant has been broken. Jeremiah 31:31-33, Galatians 3:15-18.

Because of its unconditional nature, the Abrahamic Covenant cannot be broken by any disobedience on the part of the Jewish people. In contrast to that, Leviticus 26:14-39 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68 clearly present the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant as being dependent upon the full obedience of the nation to ALL the provisions of the Law of Moses, not just those you choose to obey!! (James 2:10). Furthermore, the Jewish prophet Jeremiah presents the Mosaic Covenant as being so broken so as to necessitate a New Covenant being given (Jer. 31:31-33). Rabbi Shaul (Paul) in Galatians 3:15-18 confirms that the Abrahamic Covenant continues in full legal force today even though Mosaic law is no longer 'binding' upon believers. While the Mosaic Law is from God and is Good, Holy and Just, we were completely unable to keep it, which amply demonstrates to us the need for Messiah and the New Covenant.

6. The Abrahamic Covenant: The "Legal basis" for sending Messiah Jesus. Luke 1:67-73

In the New Covenant narrative of the birth of Messiah Yeshua, His uncle Zechariah, serving as a Jewish Priest in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, declared that the birth of Yeshua was a fulfillment of the promise that was stated in the Abrahamic Covenant: " . . . for through you all the nations of the world will be blessed" Gen 12:3

It was through the descendant of Abraham, Yeshua, that the nations (Gentiles) were blessed with the ability to have sin atoned for and to enter the Kingdom of God.

7. While the Abrahamic Covenant serves to preserve the nation of Israel, each individual Jewish person, like every person, is still a sinner in need of a redeemer. Isa. 59:1-2, 16, 20

The Abrahamic Covenant "Guarantees" the continued physical survival and existence of the Jewish people as a nation 'corporately'. The individuals mentioned in Isaiah 59:1-2 as being separated from the God of Israel were members of that covenant, but because of their individual sin, were in need of individual atonement. The method of that atonement is spelled out at the end of that chapter, in v. 20 where we read of the 'Redeemer' who is to come.