

Series: God & Abraham #1145
Title: Genesis 12.1-3
The Abrahamic Covenant

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. This is the end of our week, but we are just at the beginning of a discussion on what we will call the Abrahamic Covenant. Abrahamic is easy. This is a covenant God made with Abraham, hence "Abrahamic." But what do we mean by covenant? In a few moments we will resume our explanation that we began just at the conclusion yesterday.

But first this from my memory. I grew up in a family full of boys. There was my brother and myself in our family of four, and then my cousins – three of them, all boys – lived down the street. So that's five boys, plus two more in New Hampshire, not too far from where we lived in the State of Massachusetts, so I ran with the guys. And every so often, out playing together in our yards and in the woods, we would find the need to come to some sort of agreement with one another. Almost, without exception, these would be conditional, bi-lateral covenants we'd make. That is, we would enter into an agreement that was binding on every participant for its fulfillment.

Here is a real example. One of us might say, "Let's agree that the first one who can run from the back of the yard by the fence to the backdoor of the house, the first of us to do that, will get a pack of Bubblicious bubble gum. This was a brand of chewing gum that was popular when I was a kid. My favorite flavor was watermelon. I actually do not like real watermelon (it's just so messy and, well, full of water!) but there was something about the watermelon flavor of Bubblicious that made my mouth water. I can almost taste it now, just speaking of this. Anyway, the proposal was put forth. The terms of the covenant were made known to all of us.

We will start at the fence and the first one to the backdoor of the house gets the pack of gum. All those who wanted to enter the covenant had to put their right hand into the center of our circle as a sign of agreement. Of course, each of us put our right hand in. We entered into a conditional, bi-lateral covenant. The condition is that the one who would get the gum had to outrun the rest and get to the door first. Our covenant was binding on all parties for its fulfillment. All had to run. No one could claim that packet full of sugar if he did not run. And all had to give financially, except the winner, so that we could buy that pack of gum and give it to the fastest guy.

If you were the first to the door, you won. If not, you lost and contributed money for the prize to then be awarded the winner. OK. With the covenant made, off we went! And if you want to motivate a young man to run, well then offer him free candy! Now today it is more like offer him a free hour of gaming. But back in the day, you would be amazed at what Bubblicious could do.

Oh, what's that? You want to know how I did. You want to know if I won the gum? Well, sadly, I did not. Not fast enough, I am afraid. However, just because I did not win a free pack of the gum does not mean I wasn't chomping on a piece of my own. Who says losers cannot buy their own pack?

(Boy, now I am really in the mood for some sweet, sugary chewing gum. Watermelon. Aren't you?)

That is an example of one kind of covenant. Now, simply put, a covenant is an agreement between two parties. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. In the Bible there are two types of covenants. There is an *unconditional* covenant and there is a conditional covenant. An *unconditional* covenant is an agreement between two parties, *but* is only binding on the party making the covenant. Whereas a conditional covenant, like the one in my story, a conditional covenant is binding on all parties for its fulfillment.

The Bible includes both, but the one we will focus on is the *unconditional* covenant, because this is the kind God makes with Abram in Genesis 12, verses 1-3. This is unconditional in that the covenant is binding on God alone. *God* is going to fulfill this covenant simply because He has promised to do so. Please note this in the margin of your Bible. There is nothing Abram has to do, there is no condition stated, in order for Abram to receive a land, numerous descendants, and redemption. He will receive these simply because God is promising that Abram that he will.

Let me be clear: that is not to say that Abram's obedience to God does not matter. I say that here because there will be those who will jump to this faulty conclusion. You will see as the story develops that obedience to the Lord *does* matter. But when a covenant is *unconditional* that obviously means it is not made with any conditions in mind. There is no "if" here. If Abram does this, then God will do that. No. No "if's." And, to be sure, it is a remarkable reality indeed that God puts forth an *unconditional* covenant.

So let's open our Bibles and look at the details. The **first is the promise of land**. I am reading a passage we are well familiar with, Genesis 12, verse 1, "**Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you...'**" There it is: the promise for *land*. And we already know this is the land of Canaan. In the next chapter, Genesis chapter 13, we hear God say to Abram, "**...look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; ¹⁵ for all the land which you see, I will give it to you...¹⁷ Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.**"

And then in Genesis chapter 15, verse 18, we read about the dimensions of the land. This is Genesis 15, verse 18, "**¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates...'**" So this, specifically, is that land. The Promised Land. Over in the Book of Deuteronomy chapter 30, verses 1-10 there is another covenant often called the Palestinian Covenant that again deals with this land. And I want to read just verse 5 to solidify in our minds how emphatic God is that His people will inhabit this land. I am reading Deuteronomy chapter 30, and verse 5, "**⁵ The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.**"

Who are the fathers? They are Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob – the men who have led these Israelites throughout history and up until this time in Deuteronomy 30. God's going to bring the Hebrews into the land that He marked out for Abram in Genesis 12, 13, and 15. This is God's promise, His guarantee, and His unconditional covenant.

And I know this is Friday, and maybe you are running out of energy and even distracted. And now here I am talking about land that is very far away from the land on which you now sit. Can I encourage you to hang in here with us so that I can leave you with one important insight before the weekend officially begins? Yes, I am going to repeat this on Monday, but see if you can capture it now. God's covenantal promise for land is literal. God's people are literally, for real, going to have this specific land as their own!

Let me quote theologian, and a very fine and clear writer, Paul Enns. Quote, "[This is a] *literal* covenant in which the promises should be understood literally. The land that is promised should be understood in its literal or normal interpretation – it is not a figure of heaven (*The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 51)." End quote.

Some people will misinterpret the promise for land to be spiritual rather than literal. Ah, they incorrectly say, "God means His people will have a place in heaven; the land of heaven." But Genesis 12.1 is a promise for a physical space, land, here and now, in the geography of this present world. Genesis 15, verse 18, which we read earlier makes this abundantly clear. Genesis 15.18 again, "I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates..."

Get out your map and look, friends! The river of Egypt is the Wadi El Arish. And most everyone knows about the Euphrates River. This is the promise for literal land. You can find it on a map!

I soon need to go, but we are talking about God's unconditional covenant with Abram and we have this first promise for *land*. Let's commit ourselves to be back together again on Monday, the Lord willing. I will give us a reminder of what has been said today and then we will look at the two other specific promises in the covenant. And remember that we do all of this as we continue to discover who God is.

So, get yourself some bubble gum and enjoy your weekend! I'll talk to you again on Monday!

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