

# The Divine Programme of The World's History Chapter III. The Abrahamic Programme – Part II.



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Passing by for the present the incidents connected with the birth of Ishmael, we come to the *fifth* and principal revelation of God to Abraham, that recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis. It was on this occasion that the solemn COVENANT which is mentioned eleven times over in the chapter was made. This happened thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, the natural but not the promised seed of the patriarch. Abraham was ninety years old and nine when this covenant—sealed and attested by the ordinance of circumcision—was made with him. We read—

“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gen. xvii. 1-8).

The ordinance of circumcision is then given in detail, and Sarah is included in the covenant, her name being altered in token of it, and it is revealed that *she* was to be the mother of the promised seed.

"And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. . . . And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year" (Gen. xvii. 16, 19-21).

In this last clause a chronological element is added to the promise, and the time of its fulfilment is specified. A promise as to Ishmael was uttered on this occasion, which had in substance been previously given to Hagar. He was to be blessed, to be multiplied exceedingly, to beget twelve princes and to become a great nation. It had previously been stated that he would be a wild man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him, and that he would dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

Once again, shortly after this time, on the occasion of the visit of the angels to Abraham on the plains of Mamre and the revelation of the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the promise was for a *sixth* time renewed, with an intimation that the first installment of its fulfilment was close at hand, the all-essential birth of the promised seed.

"Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and *Sarah shall have a son.*"

And again, after the birth of the long-promised seed, there was a further intimation (declaration) given that Ishmael was not to be heir with Isaac, but that the child of Abraham and Sarah was to be the seed in whom the promises were to be fulfilled (Gen. xxi. 12).

And then last, not least, came the glorious prediction, confirmed with an oath, which was given in connection with Abraham's great trial, the commanded sacrifice of his son.

"Abraham's faith had stood all former tests. It had been strong enough to break the ties that bound him to country, home, and kindred. It had patiently endured the many and long delays in the fulfilling of the promises. It had risen above all the obstacles, physical and moral, that stood in the way of their accomplishment. It had accepted Isaac and given up Ishmael. Would it stand the last demand, to give up to God the best loved thing on earth; to do what appeared not only alien to God's own character, but contrary to His own word and promise? For herein lay the peculiarity and severity of the trial as a test of faith. The command and the promise were in conflict. If he obeyed the command, he frustrated the promise; if he kept by the promise, he must break the command. But one way of reconciling them could be even fancied, and, dim though it was, the quick eye of faith discerned it. 'He accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead. In obedience to the Divine command, Isaac was forthwith unbound. The ram caught in the thicket was substituted in his stead. The fire was kindled and the sacrifice completed.

The father and son are preparing to return, when once again the voice from above is heard pronouncing the solemn words: 'By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice.'

In His intercourse with the patriarchs, God never swore by Himself but in this one case. The uniqueness and importance of the oath appears from its being quoted afterwards upon important occasions by Abraham himself, by Joseph, by Moses, by Zacharias, by Stephen, and by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as well as from its being frequently referred to by God Himself. Its utterance was *the last* that fell from the lips of God upon the ear of Abraham. (Rev. W. Hanna: "The Bible Educator," vol. i. p. 86.)

Though not given to the patriarch personally, but to his descendants, we must regard the promises to Isaac and to Jacob as all parts of the Abrahamic programme. It was because of the promise that he should inherit the land that the command was given to Isaac:

"Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and I will bless thee; for unto thee and unto thy seed I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and I will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

So to Jacob at Bethel when, as an exile journeying from Beersheba toward Haran, he was granted the vision of the ladder connecting heaven and earth, the promise was again repeated, and certain additional features added:

"Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. . . . I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Haran was not to be his home; Canaan was BETH-EL—the House of God—and God was his God; God would give him that land, and a posterity countless as the dust of the earth; mankind was to be blessed in his seed. The vastness of this programme was all the more striking because the faith of Jacob was unable to take it in. At a later period in his life, when his name was changed to Israel, his faith was probably better able to grasp the promise, which now had other features added to it.

"And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and

Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land."

Still further was the promise expanded in this patriarch's dying prophecy, and especially in the particulars mentioned as regards Judah.

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

The sceptre of the earth was yet to belong to the "lion of the tribe of Judah," who should also be the lawgiver, and yet at the same time, Shiloh, the peaceable, the Prince of peace.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Taking a wider view of the Abrahamic programme as comprising all the prophetic utterances of the patriarchal age, it would include those given to and through Isaac, Rebecca, and Jacob. Space forbids our dwelling on these, remarkable as they are. Divine foreknowledge was evinced, specially in the anticipations of the contrasted characters and fortunes of the posterity of the twin brothers Jacob and Esau. The passages of Scripture in which the subsequent history of "Esau, which is Edom," is given, and in which the mutual relations of the Edomites and Israelites at different periods are sketched, well repay a careful study. They will mostly be found under the heading "Edom, Edomites in Bagster's index, or in a concordance.

Combining now into one view all these predictions and covenant promises, given at intervals during a period of about forty years to the "father of the faithful," and confirmed subsequently to his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, we ask, What is the main outline contained in this Abrahamic programme of the world's then future history? What did it foretell?

Omitting the less salient points, the main features are three in number.

I. Abraham's posterity was to be greatly multiplied and highly distinguished; kings were to proceed from him, he was to be the father of MANY NATIONS, and especially of one GREAT NATION, which, after a period of exile, affliction, and bondage spent elsewhere, was to inherit, as their inalienable possession, the land of Canaan.

II. That the descendants of his son ISHMAEL were also to become a great and enduring nation, and one of a most peculiar character, unlike the rest of his seed, and especially that Ishmael should be the father of TWELVE PRINCES; and—

III. Lastly and mainly, that through his true "seed"—which was to be called in Isaac—"all the families of the earth," "ALL NATIONS," were to be blessed.

The name of the patriarch changed from Abram—which means exalted father—to Abraham—which means father of a multitude—condenses this prophecy into a word. He was to become *the father* of one nation, many nations, and the channel of blessing to *all* nations. It was a wonderful revelation, and one apparently impossible of fulfilment. The recipient of the predictions was a childless and aged man. Nations do not as a rule spring from individuals, much less many nations from a single father; and Abraham should always be remembered, not as a *founder* of nations, but essentially and especially a

*father*. As Adam was the father of the whole human race, and Noah the father of that portion of it which peopled the world that now is, so Abraham is the father, not only of the Jewish people, of the Arabs, Midianites, and other "children of the East," or "Saracens," but also the father of the faithful or believing people of God in all ages.

"How is the fact to be explained," asks Max Muller, "that the three greatest religions in the world, in which the unity of the Deity forms the keynote, are of Semitic origin? Mahometanism, no doubt, is a Semitic religion, and its very core is monotheism. But did Mahomet invent monotheism? Did he invent even a new name of God? Not at all.

And how is it with Christianity? Did Christ come to preach faith in a new God? Did He or His disciples invent a new name of God? No. Christ came, not to destroy, but to fulfill, and the God whom He preached was *the God of Abraham*. And who is the God of Jeremiah, of Elijah, and of Moses? We answer again: *The God of Abraham*. Thus the faith in the One Living God . . . is traced back to one man; to Him 'in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

And if from our earliest childhood we have looked upon Abraham, the Friend of God, with love and veneration, his venerable figure will assume still more majestic proportions, when we see in him the Life-spring of that faith which was to unite all the nations of the earth, and the author of that blessing which was to come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.

And if we are asked how this one Abraham passed, through the denial of all other gods, to the knowledge of the one God, we are content to answer that it was by a *special Divine revelation, granted to that one man, and handed down by him to Jews, Christians, and Mahometans, to all who believe in the God of Abraham*. We want to know more of that man—than we do; but even with the little we know of him, he stands before us as a figure, second only to One in the whole history of the world." (Max Muller: "Selected Essays," vol. ii. p. 435.)

We must now inquire into the *fulfillment* of the predictions of the Abrahamic programme.

I. When we ask, first, *did* the seed of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, become a great nation and possess the land of Canaan? And secondly, does that nation still exist? the former of these questions may be answered by an appeal to the state of the Jewish nation in the days of Solomon, who spoke of his subjects as "a great people that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude." During his reign, we read:

"Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life. . . . And he had peace on all sides round about him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

. . . And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon." (1 Kings iv, 20, 21, 24, 25, 34)

And if we inquire, secondly, does this nation still exist? lo! we are confronted with the standing miracle embodied in the word "Israel." The twelve sons of Jacob (unlike Esau and Jacob, who founded two; or Moab and Ammon, or Isaac and Ishmael) did not found twelve nations, but one. After a lapse of four thousand years that nation exists still— the only one on earth which can trace back its ancestry to a single individual at such a distance chronologically. Though now without a land and without a king, the authentic national history of the Jews, attested by ancient documents still extant, goes back farther than that of any other people. They have for 3,500 years been a nation and yet a family still, owning one father and one mother, bearing to each other the strong family likeness observable between brothers and sisters, using still the old family names, cherishing as their very heart's blood the old family traditions, living among all nations yet belonging to none, retaining even among Aryan and Hamitic peoples the peculiar and refined Semitic type,—distinct in character, in religion, in worship, in language, in customs, in memories, in hopes—distinct from all other, alike only among themselves. There they are, living still among us, confronting every nation upon earth with a present fulfilment of predictions which are four thousand years old. They speak all Gentile languages, and dwell in all Gentile lands, yet sharply defined lines separate them from the rest of the Gentile world; and so broad and deep is the distinction, that the division of the human race into Jews and Gentiles puts Israel alone on the one side, and all the earth besides on the other. The Jews are the oldest of nations, and yet they exist in full vigour still, after their early contemporaries—Hittites, Amorites, Egyptians, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Babylonians, Medians, Persians and Grecians, as well as their later contemporaries—Seleucida, Ptolemies, and Caesars, have all long since passed away.

Century after century, millenary after millenary have rolled by, since the programme we are considering was first divinely announced, and *all those ages unanimously attest its fulfilment*. It is some four thousand years since the birth of the promised seed, three thousand five hundred since the exodus and the birth of the Jewish *nation*, and eighteen hundred years since the Jewish dispersion; and yet, though they have been the most sorely afflicted people known to history, they are still preserved; and now, in this nineteenth century, they are again obtaining, through their wonderful financial skill and immense money resources, such power in the civilized world, that emperors, kings, princes, and presidents are forced to treat them with consideration and respect, and are even in many lands afraid of them. Though so long scattered in all countries, and destitute of a government of their own, they are none the less one people still.

The Universal Israelite Alliance binds the scattered Jews all the world over into one body; the Hebrew Bible, the synagogue ritual, the fasts and feasts of the Jewish calendar, the ordinance of circumcision, the seventh day Sabbath rest,—these and other distinctive observances make the Jews, dwell where they may, *one people*. As a nation, they are absolutely unique in

character; and though their national independence lasted but for a short part of their long history, though they have never been very numerous, and though they have always been despised and disliked by other nations, they have nevertheless as a people exerted more decided and widespread influence on the world than any other that ever existed. And "what conceivable explanation is there of the history of the Jews, with their inextinguishable vitality, and the fulfilment again and again of their unquenchable hopes, except the truth that God had chosen them, and that God was with them? They had no righteousness, but were a stiff-necked people. They had no splendid territory *in possession*, though such a one was *given* them. They had no grand genealogy—a Syrian ready to perish was their father. They were not powerful enough of themselves even to conquer their own small land. They were not united; Ephraim envied Judah, and Judah vexed Ephraim. They were not free, but became the prey of nation after nation. They were not a maritime people, for their strip of sea-coast was mostly harbourless, and not their own. They had no commercial industry like Venice or Holland, no art like Greece, no arms like Rome, no colonies like England, no philosophy like Germany. They were constantly starting aside like a broken bow. Yet no power has ever been able to crush, no persecution to destroy them. They have influenced, taught, pervaded mankind. Their sacred book is the sacred book of humanity, their religious ideas are becoming more and more the religious ideas of the race. What explains it all, and alone explains it? Nothing but the truth that 'God showed His word unto Jacob, His statutes and ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation.'"

The history of the Jewish nation is familiar to all, and we shall have to consider certain phases of it in connection with more advanced and complex programmes later on. We need not, therefore, dwell on it much in this place, where the fact of its past and present *existence* and of its *relation* to the patriarch Abraham is the main point before us. We must, however, allude to one prediction frequently reiterated in the programme before passing on. The posterity of the patriarch was to be greatly multiplied—"as the sand of the seashore and as the stars of heaven." Seven times over, to Abraham, again to Isaac and again to Jacob, was this promise repeated as something distinct from the mere development of his seed into a nation, It was characterized by a special fecundity, and was, under the blessing of God, to increase with unusual rapidity. This has been throughout their history, and still is, a remarkable characteristic of the Jewish race. Had it not been so, they must long since have become extinct. So severe have been the bondages and servitudes they have undergone, so cruel and unnatural the edicts issued from time to time against them ever since Pharaoh's command that their male children should be drowned in the Nile, so terrible have been the wars waged against them and the massacres inflicted on them, so unhealthy the conditions in which they were compelled to exist all through the Middle Ages, that it is only by a miracle they have survived at all.

But their vitality is unquestionably greater than that of Gentiles; and the rapid increase which in Egypt, even under most unfavourable conditions, alarmed Pharaoh and his people, is *habitual* with them. They always tend to outgrow the nations among whom they dwell in number. After the return of fifty thousand only from Babylon (Ezra ii. 64), they had multiplied to

millions by the time of Christ, in spite of the Maccabaeen persecutions. When Titus destroyed Jerusalem, it is recorded that over a million were assembled in the city. Though now for eighteen hundred years an exiled nation and exposed to terrible persecutions, yet they have again multiplied to eight millions. "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew," is the testimony borne about them in Egypt, and which might be borne about them still. Births occur among them in a greater proportion than among the Gentiles, and they have besides an unusually low average of mortality.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "According to the *Civilstands-Register* of Frankfort, for the period between the years 1846 and 1858, while the fourth part of all children born among the Christian population had passed away before the age of six years and eleven months, the fourth part of all Jews born were not gone until twenty-eight years and three months; *half* of all Christians born had died before reaching thirty-six years and six months, while half of the Jews survived the age of *fifty-three*; of Christians born, three-fourths had passed away before reaching the age of sixty, while of the Jews one-fourth were still living at seventy-one! Again, according to the church and synagogue records of the Prussian monarchy for the eighteen years from 1823 to 1841, the average of deaths annually among the Gentile population was one in every thirty-four, but among the Jews only one in forty-six. Twenty per cent, of the Jews reached seventy years, as against only twelve per cent of the Christians.'—(Kellogg : "The Jews, Prediction and Fulfilment," p. 181.)

The Jews in America, within the last forty-two years, have increased in number from 50,000 in a population of 20,000,000 to \$00,000 in the present population. This is a most remarkable fact. It means that while the general population has *trebled* in the period, the Israelites have increased *tenfold*—far more rapidly than any other race. Their advance in wealth and power during the same time has been proportionate to their increase in numbers. They are recognised as the most influential members on all New York commercial exchanges, on several of which they occupy the position of chairman or treasurer. They negotiate the most important government loans and railway operations. They have almost absorbed the import trade in diamonds, watches, and jewellery, so that many of the oldest Gentile firms have been swept out of existence.

But one fact which is obvious to all in New York speaks more as to their growth in power and influence than many figures. The rich and important street of Broadway—the central part of New York, lying between Canal Street and Union Square—which used formerly to be occupied by magnificent shops, has of late undergone a complete change. The retail trade has gone to the up-town thoroughfares, and of the four hundred buildings in the district almost all are occupied by wholesale Jewish firms. Out of twelve hundred such firms one thousand are Jewish.

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