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**Abraham's Covenant (Gen 17:1-22) -
interpretation and reception old-, inter- and
new-testamentary**

– SUMMARY –

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Summary

Abraham is one of the most important Old Testament characters. A whole theology of obedience, truth, and communion develops around him. If Abraham had not existed in history, then we would not have known how fear in trust, unease in safety, and powerlessness in fulfillment can be clothed. A whole series of interpretations developed around Abraham about the relationship between God and man. For this reason, restrictively, I considered it auspicious to treat the theme of the Abrahamic covenant and to describe the echo it has in the scriptural space. The covenant with Abraham is unique in its functionality. Other covenants before the Abrahamic one are described in the book of Genesis; let us remember the covenant made with our forefathers or Noah, covenants which also concerned all of humanity. However, what happens within the Abrahamic covenant and the unique way of manifesting its universality make this subject, for a scientific work, arouse much interest and attention in the treatment.

Abraham and all his evolution in relation to God are also linked to the destiny of other characters. We will meet in the biblical report with names such as: Sarah, Ismael and Isaac, members of the family of Abraham about whom we will learn peculiarities through the words of Scripture. God shapes their destiny as a result of Abraham's agreements or requests. As interdependent as the characters' relationship with Abraham and his actions is, as dependent is Abraham on God. The destiny of Ismael and Abraham are in the spotlight in the sequence of Gen 17:19-22, while the previous verses pave the way for the universalism of these two destinies. Abraham starts a unique covenant, denoted by history as his own, but this is debatable, given that through Isaac we will observe the functionality of the covenant, its continuity, and the way of manifestation among the nations; all these stages being marked by the sign of circumcision.

From the head of the place we must make known the fact that in the western space there are works that treat the Abrahamic covenant. Authors such as Gerhard von Rad, N. T. Wright, and E. Raymond Capt. dealt comprehensively with the theme of the Abrahamic covenant, while a significant number of exegetes, which I will mention below, deal only tangentially with aspects of the Abrahamic covenant or even the covenant itself. This is not an impediment, but an interpretive reality. The covenant was not written unknowingly, but only through the safety of the correct analysis of the reference texts. This little Western bibliographic resource is not accidental. Even in the eastern space, no increased attention was paid to the biblical covenant. In the literature of the Romanian of specialty there is only one paper that deals with the theme

of the covenant: "Hermeneutical reflections on the Theology of the Old Testament Covenant" belonging to Father Ionica Daniel-Alin and presented in the summer of 2019. The mention of these few works dealing with the subject of the covenant and the warning of their existence in the theological space stand as testimony to the motivation of the choice of this theme for treatment in a larger work that we have titled: "The Covenant of Abraham (Gen 17:1-22) - the interpretation and reception of the Old-Inter and New Testament".

According to the theme contained in the sequence we analyze, Gen 17,1-22, in this paper attempts are made to treat several topics. The titles of the chapters are suggestive and aim to place the theme of the covenant in the old-inter and new testament space. The multitude of treatable subjects on the same subject of the covenant was the support necessary to make the decision to deal with this issue. In an attempt to sketch Abraham's profile, I discovered that every episode of his life marked in a certain way, not only Abraham (the biblical character), but Abraham himself, the historical one, who sits on the pedestal of patriarchal standards.

The goals I set for myself to achieve in this paper are forward-looking. The reason why the theme in question may arouse interest is the very multitude of topics that the reference text for the Abrahamic covenant generates. What I propose in this work is to present as concretely as possible the evolution of the Abrahamic covenant in the Holy Scripture, but not only. Related to this evolution, a series of scriptural passages and documents auxiliary to holy scripture will be used and will create the necessary foundation for understanding the Abrahamic covenant as being placed in the possibility of its growth and understanding. I also aim to define as comprehensively as possible the profile of an Abraham not only historically, but also spiritually; a parent not only of Israel, but of all nations, as God himself repeatedly calls him (Gen 17:4-8). This goal is meant to bring Abraham closer to the Orthodox faith and Christianity in particular. The tendency to leave the characters of the Old Testament in the shadows is not exactly appropriate, because they represent models to which our Savior Jesus Christ together with the Holy Apostles often refers.

In the analysis of the outstanding scriptural texts and as a treatment of them, I propose that during the present thesis I offer as much credit as possible to the spiritual interpretation regarding the descriptive events of the conception of the Abrahamic covenant, but also on the reception of the covenant by the Holy Apostle Paul. This objective is two-way: on the one hand, I aim to certify through this spiritual interpretation the universalism that the Eastern space speaks of about the covenant, and on the other hand, I will strive to make known that the covenant with God (not just the Abrahamic one) represents a sacred commitment with which man must be accustomed in his epectatic course. God does not oblige man to belong to the

covenant he proposes, but he rejoices at the moment of human engagement in a covenant established by Him.

In treating the topic proposed for research, we used the classical methods of approaching the scriptural text. The historical and anagogic methods, as principles of hermeneutical interpretation, are the basis of the analysis made. In an attempt to avoid the rigidity of western interpretations and to use, however, its objectivity, I chose to intertwine, in the exegesis of the verses related to the main sections (Gen 17:1-22; Rom 4 and Gal 3), Eastern realism with Western spirituality. The Holy Fathers do not err in their interpretations and leave no room for probability. In the light of the revelations of truth through their words, characters such as Abraham, Sarah, and Ismael are not outlined by their infirmities, shortcomings, or unbelief, but are presented as human by their actions. Certainly, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers makes it so that to a large extent we can see the "clay" from which "the good-pleasing to God" is processed, something that we do not see presented, in general, by the Western exegetes. For this reason, as a way of approaching the treatment of the theme and as applied exegetical principles, I sought to combine the historical-critical (Western) reality with the (Eastern) spirituality, inclined especially towards the latter.

The structure of the work, based on this analysis of the Abrahamic covenant, is relatively simple. In the first part, an attempt is made to expose the specific features of the veterotestamentary covenant. Thus, the first chapter represents a very short preamble, a place where the current state of the research and the way of insertion of the research in the interpretative-veterotestamentary area regarding the theology of the covenant are presented. The second chapter will attempt to present the terminological substrate of the covenant. Like any theme of impact and like any valuable concept, the covenant is also a bridge over a valley of interpretations, terms and meanings. The etymology of the word berit is the most important part of this section, due to the fact that in a close connection with it it will be attempted to identify the concept and all the historical-theological peculiarities of the covenant as a historical and legal act.

The Abrahamic covenant occupies much of the concern of some Western exegetes. Thus, using various authors and illustrious analysts of the scriptural text and their works, I will try to evoke and solidify the most pertinent interpretations of the Abrahamic covenant and its content. In an attempt to answer modern questions - What can the Abrahamic covenant represent for today's Christian? Does a rudimentary commitment still have value in the modernity of legal contracts? What is the universality of the covenant if circumcision is no longer practiced? – we correlated the information contained in different collections of scriptural

interpretations: WBC, NIV, NAC, NIICOT, JPS, ACCS, etc.; with patristic resources, studies and specialized articles. The information contained in these works used as bibliographic resources is not contradictory. As a rule, the Holy Fathers turned to presenting the Abrahamic covenant as being encompassed by spirituality and placed in eternity. A number of patristic interpretations sought to describe the reason of certain verses mentioned in Gen 17:1-22 (as we see, for example, in the treatment of verse 12 by St. Ambrose and Origen). The interpretations of the analysis of Gen 17:1-22 are so vast and delightful that we cannot rule out that the Abrahamic covenant can constitute an inexhaustible source of interpretations, both theological and historical.

The central part of the work includes these interpretations itself. During the course of remembering and treating them I will try to build an index of the most prolific of these and emphasize the unanimity of receiving them in the exegetical space. The present work does not want to encompass particularities of the Abrahamic covenant by omitting generalities, but rather by completing them. In a first section of theological analysis, within the fourth chapter, I will try to offer the most competent exegetical approach to the defining text for the Abrahamic covenant: Gen 17:1-22. With a presentation of the sequences of the most important and the treatment of topical topics, both historical and social-theological, I will try to observe the evolution of Abraham, the covenant itself, and Israel. These aspects will be complemented by the content of the fifth chapter, which seeks to identify the reception of the Abrahamic covenant in the veterotestamentary space; both its anticipations and its effects and affectations.

Inter testamentary literature also has a specific place in the work, for it can serve as a testimony to the fact that the Abrahamic covenant was not lost in the mists of time, was not confined only to the Jewish space, and was not only noted in a restricted period of time in functionality. Although it is not an extended chapter of the work, chapter six includes works such as 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and the Damascus document, places where this covenant appears mentioned and several descriptive passages of it are identified.

Last but not least, for the Abrahamic covenant will endure in eternity through its observance, the last chapter of the work brings the Avrami covenant closer to its reception in our day. It is the New Testament space that, on the one hand, certifies the covenant by presenting its status among the descendants of Abraham, and on the other hand recalls the covenant, recalling its historical impact, the theological and social and political. Israel had a central pillar in the adoption of this covenant. Abraham defined history by the agreement of fellowship to the covenant, and this is explained by a series of New Testament texts, such as: Rom 4 and Gal 3.

This is the very purpose of the work – to bring as close as possible to our day a covenant that, although it is placed for eternity, is not received as actual. Abraham is a foreparent for Israel, but he is also a proto-father of the Gentiles. This is best described by chapter 4 of the Epistle to the Romans, but the assumption by the Apostle Paul of this trait of Abraham is not received as sufficient. The Abrahamic Covenant is not an exclusive theological covenant, but also a pattern for covenants in the legal space. Abraham is a partain of a reality meant to restructure the world. If Abraham had not existed, what would have happened to the pattern of obedience? Who could have been counted sufficiently prepared for a fellowship in God's plan? The historical purpose of Abraham is and will remain a purpose for all of humanity. The covenant will be the key to the joint-work between God and man until His coming into the world, and after this it will be the guarantor of God's spiritual presence before the nations, like his presence before Israel.

The theme of the work is a topical one and the approach made is a matter of originality. Although in the eastern space there were several works on the veterotestamentary covenant, in the eastern space, punctually, regarding the Abrahamic covenant, there are quite a few works. In the Romanian space, only Ionică Daniel spoke about the covenant in a general sense in the veterotestamentary space, his thesis being under the coordination of Father Ioan Chirila. Exclusively on the Abrahamic covenant, a vast work was not conceived that would encompass the evolution of the Abrahamic covenant and its reception from the first Advent of the Old Testament to the New Testament area.

For the success of conceiving this work I am glad to bring gratitude to Father Ioan Chirila. He was not only a mentor and coordinator of my work during my PhD studies, but also a careful ruler of my vision of the Abrahamic covenant. The work could not have been so well structured if we did not heed the advice and warnings of his holiness. I remain engulfed in the hope that this work will be a landmark, not so much for those who deepen the mysteries of the old-inter-testament and New Testament covenant, but for those who seek to discover Abraham "the fallen with his face to the earth" before the greatness of God and the agreement of cooperation in the creation of a covenant for eternity.

The reception of the covenant in the biblical space is extremely important. For this aspect, I tried, by correlating the specialized studies with the scientific works dedicated to this theme (from the Western space, especially) to offer a more concrete image of the covenant, leading my work to an analysis of the Abrahamic covenant. Thus, we came to the conclusion that the Abrahamic covenant, by extending its functionality, is the most important Old Testament covenant. The fact that Abraham is the person involved in the covenant in the first

phase, is the necessary support to the understanding that Abraham is the image of the patriarchs, the image of the relationship with God and the proto-part of Israel.

In analyzing all the aspects regarding the scriptural references dedicated to the covenant and with a special attention to the places belonging to the inter testamentary literature, we have come to the opening of the different topics of approach, themes mentioned from the very title of each subsection separately. In the analysis of the sequence Gen 17,1-22 I noticed various interpretative impasses on which I sought answers in the literature, in the patristic and Jewish literature. The steps taken to include, as far as possible, all the opinions and interpretations regarding the verses belonging to the mentioned sequence were as conforming as possible to the techniques of treating such an analysis. I used several collections of biblical commentary (WBC, NAC, NICOT, NIV, Continental) that I considered to be the most comprehensive in describing an objective analysis of the scriptural text approached. In addition to these objective analyses, we have brought the patristic interpretations that constitute an eminently necessary support in use. The Holy Fathers, through grace and the cleansing of mind and soul, were able to see beyond the scriptural text. They were also the ones who, beyond Abraham's powerlessness, could see in him a standard, a brave righteous of the Old Testament. These things are not included in the area of western exegese, where Abraham's inability to understand God's will and fear was brought to the fore. Abraham was a mere man, from an anthropological point of view, but God considered him to be more than a mere inhabitant of the earth and chose him as a partaking of a plan for the restoration of the world, which is marked by the covenant made with him and through him.

The analysis we have made is a topical one, due to the fact that the bibliographic sources used are valuable. Other such approaches to the Abrahamic covenant are not found. In the Western space there was talk of the covenant in general, but not exclusively of the Abrahamic covenant. My research seeks to be as original and novel as possible, because the approach of the Abrahamic covenant does not stop only at the 17th chapter of the Book of Genesis, but tries to find the historical thread of dealing with this subject and of universality described and applied through and by the Abrahamic covenant.

On some of the topics contained in the approach, it has been quite a long time. Circumcidement, for example, is the subject of many works, articles or theses, for it is a historical and theological event alike. What's more, the influence of this gesture in ancient times demonstrated that the sign of the Abrahamic covenant had a legal and social impact in particular. This subject approaches the interpretative limits through the multitude of dedicated works, but themes such as the holiness of Abraham, the obedience of Abraham or the

involvement of Sarah and the two sons in the history of the covenant, are themes that can be dealt with later in other works. Covenant theology opens up themes of multiple approaches, like the Abrahamic covenant. During my analysis I have often wondered if each verse does not constitute a subject worthy of consideration in a separate work. On how Abraham dialogued with God can be persisted without any restraint. The enigmatic attitude is the support of approaches to man's ability to receive God's will. In the New Testament area we can see that the covenant was received in its universality and so we can ask ourselves how the Holy Apostles, and then, why not, the Holy Fathers, managed to talk about the Abrahamic covenant in the absence of circumcidity and how they managed to make credible before the Gentiles a covenant that was apparently intended for Israel? There are many aspects to which attention can be drawn and they can constitute future research topics. Thus, I believe that this paper does not seek to close the doors of an approach, but to open the doors to new research topics.

The subject is not limited in any way. Abraham constitutes an inexhaustible source of humanity clothed in obedience and faith. The covenant is also a benchmark of God's goodwill and His way of being fair to people who are in the sea of sin and do not seek to start sufficient actions of escape from it. Sarah constitutes a female model of obedience before man, while Ismael and Isaac are testimonies of eternity experienced by the dedication of their parents. All the scriptural texts approached speak of realities, not so much historical, but spiritual. God has counted us worthy to be partakers of an agreement with Him, but not for a limited time, but for eternity.

During my research I have encountered few difficulties in analyzing the scriptural text and in presenting the concept of the covenant itself. This is because the exegesis of the last centuries has focused on making the most comprehensive explicitness of what it means: circumcise, obedience to Abraham, involvement of the family, descendants and all peoples in the Abrahamic covenant. At the same time, the multitude of interpretations has also favored the development of other topics that can be proposed for research. Some of these I mentioned in the paper, however, the thesis itself opens some particular directions of research. For example, the name change represents, both for the Jewish space and for the Christian space, an interesting landmark for capitalizing on the message of God. Man undergoes a special spiritual change and it is only by observing it that the possibility of changing the names appears. Interfering with several theological aspects, both with regard to the scriptural text and on the dogmatic aspects, I consider this theme of the name/name change to be a direction of research. On the other hand, if we look strictly at the Abrahamic covenant and the fact that it generated the possibility of treating it in an extended way, consequently, as directions of future approach

to the covenant, I believe that the treatment of covenants: Adamic, Noetic, and Davidic, is imperative in the theological space. This kind of approach can delicately explain a functionality of veterotestamentary covenants and a mark of their presence.

In fact, not only is the Abrahamic covenant oriented towards a universal functionality, but they are all oriented towards a solution to a mundane problem in a peculiar spiritual manner. God is not limited to covenants to exercise his plans, but he endures through them in people's lives. The Old Testament is the supporting material for understanding the graph of man's understanding with God, and Abraham reaches one of the maximum heights of such a graph. For this reason, the covenant concluded with him ensures that the entire axis of mankind can at least strive to that maximum.

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