

Bible Overview: 2 The God of the Covenant

God establishes his 'Covenant with Abraham'

Gen 12:1-3

Gen 15:1-21

Gen 17:1-22

What is a covenant?

"Think of it as a marriage bond between God and his people...he is redeeming a people for himself, a promise most gloriously expressed throughout Scripture by the formula, "I will be your God and you will be my people"... a covenant is a 'binding personal relationship'. (Back to Basics)

A covenant between God and man has conditions/stipulations and promises of union and communion.

It would often be inaugurated by a ceremony in which one or both parties would express their commitment to the other.

(Marriage gives us a good picture of what a covenant is:

It is inaugurated by a public ceremony in which both parties express their commitment to the other – vows.

It is a binding personal relationship that is exclusive.

It unites two people (they become 'one flesh') and its purpose is communion – intimacy, friendship and love.

There is an outward sign given)

The goal or ultimate purpose of the covenant is that God will be united with his people in a loving, personal and unbreakable relationship.

There are a number of 'covenants' in the Bible:

- Adam – Hosea 6:7
- Noah – Genesis 9 (note repeat of Genesis 1:28 -9:1,7) covenant sign – rainbow – to remind who?
- Abraham
- Moses
- David
- Jesus

SOME CLUES TO SPOT 'COVENANT THINKING' IN THE BIBLE:

- Any use of the phrase 'I will be your God, you will be my people'
- The word translated 'steadfast love', 'unfailing love'^his love that endures', 'everlasting love', 'great love', or just sometimes 'love' – Hebrew word = 'hesed' – his special, unbreakable, 'covenant love for his people,

as apart from his 'general love' to all mankind (eg Psalm 48:9, 51:1, 52:8)

- 'Lord' when it is spelt LORD = 'yahweh' – God's covenant name, the name by which he reveals himself to his people

Gen 12:1-3 God promises:

- Abraham will be a great nation
- His name will be great
- God will bless Abraham and he will be a blessing to all nations

Note God's commitment to world mission:

(It begins in Genesis 1:28, but also Genesis 3:15 and now in Genesis 12)
Right at the beginning of the call of Abraham, the 'father of the Jewish people' God's intention is clearly expressed – to bring a blessing to the world through Abraham.

Gen 17:1-22 God promises:

- The covenant will be everlasting (v7)
- The land of Canaan (v8) – note that the purpose of the land is that God will be there and will bless his people (On the basis of this – ought modern Israel to cast out all Palestinians from the 'Promised Land, indeed to kill them if necessary?)
- Abraham will be the father of many nations – ie he will have many descendants (v4-6)
- Circumcision is to be the sign of the covenant (v11)

Call to Abraham has a double promise:

- To bless Abraham
- To make Abraham a blessing

Blessing = the pronouncement of God's favour (biblically it is the most glorious human experience imaginable)

Opposite = Curse. The curse of God is his judgement, covenant-breaking brings us under the curse of God.

IN GROUPS – DISCUSS 'HOMEWORK' PASSAGE GENESIS 22

Why do you think this chapter is in the Bible?

Do you think God is cruel/sadistic to Abraham/Isaac?

From what we have seen at the beginning of this week – how might we begin to understand what this chapter is about?

NOTE GENESIS 15:2-5, 17:1, 17-22

Blazing Torch Genesis 15

- i- Abraham seeks reassurance of God's promises v2,8
- ii- Abraham is justified by faith v6
- iii- The ceremony of the blazing torch

Meaning and Significance:

Jeremiah 34:18-19 "The men who violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces" (an example of a covenant ceremony and commitment)

In this covenant 'ceremony' – who goes between the dead animals – and who doesn't? (v12)

Smoking brazier/blazing torch – one of the symbols of God's presence

Its significance?

"If I do not keep my promise – may it be to me as to these dead animals, may I be killed and torn in two"

- Who makes the promise?
- Who fulfils it?

What role does Abraham play in this? What does he promise?

What are the implications of this – is the covenant God makes here 'conditional' or 'unconditional'?

What does it 'cost' God to be faithful to his covenant promises?

When else in the Bible do we read of darkness falling (v17)

Galatians 3:13-14

Who are the countless descendants of Abraham?

Read Galatians 3:6-9

READ Revelation 7:9

Abraham and Isaac:

Without an understanding of all Scripture pointing to Christ – what problems/concerns might this passage arouse?

V2 Is Isaac Abraham's only son? Is that expression familiar?

V2 How far is it to Mount Moriah (v4) why go there? (2 Chron 3:1)

V6 Is this reminiscent of anything?

What gave Abraham such assurance to follow God's commands (17:21)
Here is a beautiful example of faith in the promises of God in face of seemingly impossible circumstances.

V14 What does Abraham call the mountain – what is the full significance of this.

What is the difference between Abraham the father and God the Father?

As you read this story – who do you emotionally engage with?

Story of Joseph:

Faithful through innocent suffering

Constant descent – divine vindication (Phil2:5-11)

Key verse Gen 50:20

Joseph's suffering brought salvation to many

Jacob's blessing of sons:

Which is most significant – who might we expect?

Gen 49:8-12, Rev 5:1-6

For next time: Read the Book of Jonah

- Why did Jonah flee?
- What was Jonah angry about?
- If you had to pick one verse as the most important/significant in the book which would you choose?
- To whom did Jonah address the message that he preached?
- Who do you think the 'book' of Jonah was written to – to whom is the book addressed?
- What might be its significance in the Old Testament