

The God of The Covenant:

Genesis 17:1-14

Sunday October 31st 2010 Morning Service

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What is this covenant? It is given to us in chapter 15. It is an agreement to bless Abram, to bring from him a great nation and also to give this nation a great homeland. It is a gracious covenant: God makes it ultimately secure, even if Abram or his descendents should fail. However, it is also a conditional covenant (17:9;14) in that there are rewards and punishments for obedience and disobedience. The ultimate end of a nation and a land are secure, but the route on the way is filled with blessings and curses, depending on obedience or disobedience. What we are reminded of in chapter 17 is that God wishes to raise up a special people and that he promises to give them a homeland.

The NT takes all this up as an example as to how we should live. We are to live by faith. Read Hebrews 11:8-16. All this is seen as a picture of salvation. Read Hebrews 11:1; 39-40. The story of Abraham should teach us to live in obedience and faith in the present, looking forward to a future homeland for ourselves, a New Heaven and a New Earth.

God's agreement with Abram pictures something of his promises to us in Jesus. Jesus purchases for us the unconditional nature of the covenant (God walking through the divided animals for himself and Abram, c.f. – Ch. 15), but also the conditional nature of the covenant in this life through blessing coming from obedience, and discipline from disobedience. The land could be temporarily lost due to disobedience (Dt. 28:62-63; 30:1-10).

More than this, it is also a picture of heaven. Abram was promised a homeland; we are promised heaven. Abram lives as a traveller in temporary tent; we live in this life in our bodies, which are temporary tents, while we wait for something better. Abram was called to live in the present in the light of what was promised in the future. So are we.

There are two main things that are taught us here. First, God desires to bless us, and second, the conditions that are given for ongoing blessing.

1. God Desires to Bless Us The Blessings and Promises of the Covenant (1-8)

a. Descendants - GOD loves people and wants to bless them

What this blessing of the covenant meant then to Abraham God will greatly increase his numbers (2); Abram will be the Father of many nations (4); he will be called Abraham (5) (Abram means exalted father; Abraham means father of many); Kings will come from him (6); this will be an everlasting covenant (7) – between God and Abraham’s descendants; the Lord will be the God of Abraham’s descendants (7-8). God was going to create a people from Abraham that would be his vehicle of salvation and blessing to the whole human race. From him would come great kings, priests, prophets and martyrs, and even the Messiah himself. Israel would be an example of the workings of the love and discipline of God.

What this blessing of the covenant means to us today The ultimate fulfilment of this promise would be another nation, a spiritual nation that would come from trust in Abraham’s greatest son, Jesus. God is calling a people to himself, the Church, or literally, the gathering. This great spiritual nation is being gathered from all nations and all peoples and all time. Ultimately, it will gather in heaven and will populate the new heaven and new earth. They will be as many people as the stars in the sky. We become part of that great promised people by faith in Jesus Christ.

b. Land – God is preparing an eternal home for us.

‘I will give you the whole land of Canaan’ (8); ‘I will give it to you as an everlasting possession (8). Land is important for a nation. God was going to provide a homeland for this special people. Why was this gift of land so important? It was going to be the stage upon which God was going to fulfil his promise to bless the whole world. The aim was not merely racial, for Israel alone. God was going to bless the whole world through this land. This land was going to be the place where a whole host of instructive case studies and examples were going to be worked out for our benefit. There we would see what it meant for a people to be obedient to God, and there we would see what would happen if they turned against him. This was to be the stage upon which most of the multi-textured Word of God was to be enacted and written down. And more than this, it was to this land that the Messiah would come; it was where he would teach, where he would do his miracles, where he would die for our sins, where he would rise from the dead and where he would ascend to heaven. This was to be the stage upon which our salvation would be provided.

The new heaven and the new earth, the homeland that God’s people are promised in the New Testament, is the ultimate fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham. God has promised to those who trust in Jesus an eternal homeland. Like Abraham, our present life feels impermanent and temporary, which it surely is. But we are looking forward in faith to something better: heaven. We are not to live just for the present, but for our eternal homeland. This is an encouragement when things are hard, when we are bereaved, when aging, when approaching our own death. Moreover, living with an eye on that land should help us turn from sin.

2. The Conditions of God Blessing You The Conditions of the Covenant (9-14)

a. We must be Sincere (1)

- i. **‘Walk before me’ – have an ongoing relationship with the Lord** What does it mean ‘to walk before God’? To ‘walk before God’ means living your life conscious of his presence, aware that he sees you and being continually reliant upon him. It means to know that you are accountable and dependent. ‘To walk’ in the Bible has something to do with lifestyle and relationship. It means doing what God wants you to do and leaning upon him for the strength to do it. It means following Jesus, obeying his commands and trusting him. **Be Blameless** ‘Blameless’ in Scripture does not mean without sin, for no one is in that position. Rather, it is having a disposition that is always aiming at sinlessness. It is having an attitude to life that always attempts to avoid wrongdoing, that always tries to do what is right and is quick to confess when failure occurs. It is characterised by humility and by carefulness.

b. We must be Serious

We must consecrate ourselves unreservedly to God’s service: ‘Every male among you shall be circumcised’ (12-14) This was a mark that they were God’s people. The mark was done to the reproductive organs because this was a reproductive, or racial, covenant. It was made to Abraham and those that came from his body. The blessing, however, was to spread out beyond this racial group to the whole world. God said to Abraham that the whole world would be blessed through him (Genesis 22:18). This came true. The Law came through the people of Israel; Jesus Christ came from Abraham. Moses brought the Law that revealed our sin and gave us principles for life; Jesus brought us salvation, the kingdom of God and eternal life.

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