

Faith in the Covenant - Part 2

WWJD Journey Preview

Galatians 3:7, 9, 29

We serve a covenant-making God, and the way God always deals with his people is in covenant terms. A covenant of God is him making promises to us, and binding himself to them in an irreversible way, making the promises unbreakable, everlasting, and immune from us screwing them up or making them go away. *That's good news!* Our part, now, is to *receive* what he's already done for us. But, first we need to know what he's *promised* to us and then learn how we can step into and walk in those very promises that he's made.

If we can grab hold of the covenant that God has made with us, we will walk in a level of blessing, favor, goodness, success, and relationship with God that will blow our minds and literally set the pace for our entire life, bringing everything else into focus. Of the six covenants established by God, two are particularly relevant to us - the new covenant with Jesus, and the covenant he made with Abraham.

That covenant wasn't just for Abraham and his natural descendants, but for every single person for all time who lives and walks by faith in Jesus Christ. It's part of our inheritance as New-Testament Christians - literally the equipment that he's given us to fulfill our individual callings in life - the ability, resources, blessing, and favor to go and be salt and show who God is. We have to receive and appropriate that equipment in our lives by faith, just like Abraham.

Galatians 3:7, 9, 29

"Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise [grafted in]."

God had three different encounters where he made promises to and established a covenant with Abraham. The first one started with God coming to Abraham and telling him to leave his home and to go to a place that God would show him later along the way. Abraham's response to God was a faith response - he took God at his word, having only minimal information and simply trusting in the One who said it.

His first step opened the next phase of what God wanted to do and say to him. God spoke seven promises to Abraham: *“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”* (Genesis 12:1-3 NIV). Those seven promises form the basic foundation of where we stand with God and what we have as believers in him.

Genesis 15:1-6

“The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.’ And Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’ Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’ And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” [Abraham associated reward with family and generational blessing]

Abraham went from *“How?”* to *“Wow! I don’t get it, but I trust you!”* God promised Abraham that his reward would be very great and that his descendants would be as plentiful as the stars of the heavens. Abraham received the promises of God by faith. If we also will begin to engage with God by faith, he will begin to birth a picture and vision in *our* spirit of what he’s going to do in our life - not to *curse* us, but to bless us.

Have we purposed to trust God without all the details? That’s the one and *only* condition for engaging with God - faith. We serve a God who is ready to give, bless, and overwhelm us with his goodness, promises, and purpose. Our part is to trust him and to simply *receive by faith* like a child.

Romans 4:13 NLT

“Clearly, God’s promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was based not on his obedience to God’s law, but on a right relationship with God that comes by faith [on his terms].”

Genesis 15:8

“And he said, “O Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it?”

Abraham's question *"How may I know I shall possess it?"* seems strange in light of the previous statement, *"Abraham believed in the Lord."* But his faith was tenuous, in need of certainty. God did not reprove him for weak faith. Instead, he provided him with incontrovertible proof of his intentions. And he did so in a way that Abraham was sure to understand - he cut a covenant with him.

Abraham was saying, *"God, even though You're good, how do I know that I'm not going to screw this up?"* The whole purpose that God cut a covenant with Abraham was to shore up Abraham's doubts in himself, fearing that he would screw it all up. In the same way, God's not rebuking us if we're in that place, so we don't need to run and hide from him. Rather, we need to trust that God is able and willing to help us in our own fears and doubts in our ability to walk in what he's called us to do.

It's a different level of faith to believe that God's grace is enough to help us. If we'll start with the measure of faith and trust that we have, he will walk us from faith to faith to the place where we believe that it's for us too - and he will lead us there *gently*.

Genesis 15:9-11

"So He said to him, 'Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away."

God has given *us* authority like Abraham to chase off the enemy when he would try to interfere with us receiving our covenant blessings. God holds *himself* to the covenant whether we are faithful or not - whether *we're* obedient or not. The only condition is our faith to enter into it. Beyond that, he covers us by binding it to himself. We don't serve a fickle God who changes his mind because *we* had a bad day, or we sinned, or messed up. Scripture says that even when we're faithless, he remains faith-full. That started with this covenant.

Genesis 15:12-18

"Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. And it came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram."

In covenant ceremony, animals were cut in two and each half placed opposite each other to form a path for the parties to walk through. This bound the parties to keep the terms of the covenant under penalty of death. The smoking oven and the flaming torch were symbols of God's presence. He revealed himself in smoke and fire on Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Ten Commandments, and he revealed himself in the pillar of fire and the pillar of smoke as he led them through the wilderness. In traditional covenant ceremony, both parties passed through the pieces, but only God passed through on the day he made a covenant with Abraham, signifying the promise was all of grace.

Romans 4:16

"For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."

God swears that He will keep the conditions of his covenant with Abraham and will even bear the consequences of *Abraham's* breaking it. This foreshadows Jesus' punishment on our behalf thousands of years in advance of him unveiling the "new covenant" through his death and resurrection! This does not mean the human conditions are irrelevant. We must trust in the Lord to benefit from his covenant promises. Abraham responded in faith: *"[he] believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness, and the Lord blessed him."*

God's answer to Abraham's self-doubt - *"God's divinely chosen cure for our unbelief is the Covenant into which God has entered with us!"* - Andrew Murray

The Third account of God's personal dealings with Abraham

Genesis 17:1-7

"Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.' And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish [activate] My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.'"

There is nothing that Abraham, the Jewish people, or we can do to screw it up or break the covenant. It's not *fragile*. Who passed through the entrails - *us or God*? Who is it dependent on - *us or God*? Who is accountable to fulfill the covenant no matter what - *us or God*? God keeps expanding on promises! He over-delivers because He loves us and blesses us. God took Abram's name which meant "beloved father" which must have felt like a constant reminder of failure, and doubled down on it expanding the promise of his name by changing it to Abraham which means "father of a multitude". God not only fulfills seemingly impossible promises in the lives of those who He is in covenant with, he does *"exceedingly, abundantly above all we could ask or think or imagine."* (Ephesians 3:20)

That's the God we serve and are in covenant with. Abraham became wealthy, influential, prosperous, respected, and had favor wherever he went. He always had more than enough to accomplish everything God directed him to do.

Abraham versus Lot - both were righteous, but they had vastly different outcomes. One was a friend of God - the other was just twenty-four hours from obliteration. Which category do we want to be in? The difference is walking by faith in covenant with God. *"Kings shall come from you."* Kings are *leaders*. God promised Abraham his influence would extend all the way to the leaders of society. Woe to us if we don't use the influence that God's given us - to be the leaders he's called us to be.

DID GOD KEEP HIS PROMISE TO ABRAHAM? - God's promise was to all of Abraham's descendants. Beginning with Isaac and then Jacob, God's blessing to Abraham is clearly in force.

Genesis 26:12-14

"Now Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the Lord blessed him, and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him."

The covenantal blessings bestowed on Isaac were even more amazing because it was a year of famine!

Genesis 35:11, 12

"God also said to him, 'I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.'"

Everywhere we go is the domain of the King of Kings. We carry with us the authority of Heaven. We walk in the leadership, influence, power, and resources of the King to whom we've been made a son or daughter. Because of that, wherever we go belongs to him. We don't come in meek and mild, weak and timid - we come in bold, confident, and full of the love of God, but also with the power of his resurrection alive in us - because of the covenant he made all the way back *then!* We don't fear anything, because God will see to it that he accomplishes what he wants to accomplish.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US?

Romans 4:13

"For the promise to Abraham and to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith."

God's covenant promise to Abraham that he would be heir of the world is the same covenant promise that we can claim to see the nations of the world brought into the kingdom of God.

This statement sums up God's many promises to Abraham (and to his descendants): *you will be heir of the world*. As Abraham's descendants, believers go into all the world to preach the Gospel, not as foreign invaders, but as rightful heirs claiming what belongs to them - dominion, authority, confidence, leadership, and influence.

Hebrews 6:13-18 (Written in the New Testament to us!)

"For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you.' And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us."

The sentence, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you," is formulaic covenant language indicating an oath. An oath is a solemn, formal declaration, affirmation, or pledge used in legal matters. The taking of an oath implies legal sanction for failing to carry out one's sworn pledge, usually involving the penalty of divine retribution.

Two unchangeable things - God's Word and God's oath - one is enough to secure complete trust, but God went the extra mile to show the unchangeableness of his promise. That should produce in us "*strong encouragement*." History has borne fruit of the Abrahamic covenant of faith through both Jewish people and Christians. Their collective contributions to the world are out-sized by orders of magnitude:

Jewish people comprise one per cent of the world's population, but 16% of the Nobel prize winners and 50% of the world's top-rated chess masters. In Austria in the years between the World Wars, Jews were 3.5% of the population but 27.3% of all university professors. In Germany between 1918-1933 Jews were 0.78% of the population but 16% of doctors, 15% of dentists, 25% of lawyers, 50% of theatre directors, and they occupied 80% of leading positions in the Berlin stock exchange. From 1957-1990 in America, average annual earnings of Jewish men were 130% of white gentiles. By the 1990's Jews were hugely over-represented among the very wealthy, comprising more than 25% of Forbes' list of the richest four-hundred Americans, 45% of the top forty richest Americans, and 33% of all American multimillionaires.

This hearkens all the way back to Genesis, and to the covenant that God never broke - to bless them wherever they go - that they would *still* be his people. Even when they're faith-*less*, he remains faith-full.

Christians invented and brought to the world hospitals, adoption, concept of holidays (holy days), the invention of the "middle class" through the teaching of dignity of work, a higher view of sexuality and marriage, dignity and freedom to women, abolition of slavery, societal status to children, history's most significant artwork and artists, music and musicians, literature and authors. Christians produced the foundation for America, created education systems, laid the foundation for science, are the most powerful force for world-wide charity - *and much more*.

It's only in the last sixty years or so that we, as Christians, have receded from the level of influence that we've carried for the last two-thousand years. *But, it's time to get it back!* We're sitting on a literal mountain of opportunity, blessing, creativity, resources, ability, and influence from Heaven, itself, to change and shape nations, destinies, and cultures - *and yet we sit back and let it be done for us by those who don't even know God.*

It's time to stand in that which God cut a covenant four-thousand years ago with Abraham, to walk by faith and to live in his promises so that the world can be blessed by the knowledge of God *everywhere we go!*

Prayer

Father, in Jesus' name, establish Your covenant with us. Activate it in our lives as we approach You by faith right now. May Your blessing, favor, presence, and goodness go before us, behind us, and all around us like You did for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so many throughout Scripture and history all the way up until now. God, we want to live and walk fully in that which You've given us. Lord, we repent for what we've been ignorant of and for having ignored Your covenant promises. Starting right now, by faith, we make a declaration that no longer will we ignore Your covenant, but we will live and walk by faith! We pray that in the name of Jesus.

Amen