**Understanding the Bible**

**Part 2**

**“Abraham—the Plan Unfolds”**

**Let’s recap: Last time we saw that God is a God of covenant. Throughout the Bible, He made 7 covenants with mankind.**

**The Adamic Covenant**

**Noahic Covenant**

**Abrahamic Covenant**

**Mosaic Covenant**

**Palestinian Covenant**

**Davidic Covenant**

**The New Covenant**

**We also learned that there are three kinds of covenants: conditional, unconditional, and general.**

**Conditional covenants are based on certain obligations and prerequisites; If you do this, I’ll do that. If you don’t do this, I won’t do that. If the requirements are not fulfilled, the covenant is broken.**

**Unconditional covenants are made with no strings attached and will be kept regardless of one’s fidelity or infidelity.**

**General covenants are not specific to one people group and can involve a wide range of people. The New Covenant, ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ, is a general covenant made first to Israel, then to all the world.**

**It’s also very important to understand that some of God’s promises are to all people, and some are limited to Israel. But all of God's promises are based on who He is and what His plan is for the world.**

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**Then last time we looked at the first two covenants—the Adamic covenant and the Noahic covenant. We saw that the Adamic covenant, found in Genesis 3:15, is the covenant the rest of the entire Bible springs from:**

**God tells the serpent, “And I will put enmity (hostility), between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15).**

**The Adamic covenant is GENERAL in nature as it applies to all of mankind. It is a promise of future provision for man's redemption in the form of what the Bible calls the woman’s “Seed.”**

**It’s also called the “gospel in the garden” because not only is it the first Bible covenant and the first Bible prophecy, but it predicts the coming of Messiah Jesus. Gen 3:15 is the John 3:16 of the OT!**

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**Now, we also saw that the devil set out to destroy God’s plan of redemption through the corruption of the entire world. But “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8).**

**For 120 years Noah worked on the ark while also declaring impending judgment to his generation if they did not repent. He did not have one convert.**

**The Great Flood struck, all of mankind perished but Noah and his wife, his 3 sons, and their wives. So Satan’s attempt to thwart God’s plan of redemption failed because through Noah God had a remnant to carry on the human race.**

**After the flood, God made a 2nd covenant—the Noahic covenant—with Noah:**

**“Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth.” 12 Then God said, “I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. 13 I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth” (Gen. 9:11-13 NLT).**

**Noah and his 3 sons—Ham, Shem, and Japheth—repopulated the earth. And God chose Shem’s lineage to be the righteous lineage through which Jesus would come. Luke 3:23-38 tracks Jesus right back to Shem, and ultimately to Adam.**

**And Luke also tracks Jesus’s lineage back to someone who came much later than Shem—Abraham, the father of our faith. From Adam to Abraham, about 1948 years have passed. And for the record, from Adam to Jesus, 4,000 years will pass.**

**The introduction of Abraham is where God takes the next major step to work out His plan of salvation. The story of Abraham begins in Genesis 12:1.**

**“Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.’”**

**This is the call of Abraham when his name was still Abram. We don’t know how God spoke to him, but somehow, without a Bible (there wasn’t one), without a prophet to speak to him, with no other form of divine communication, God spoke to Abram.**

**Abraham was the first Hebrew. God providentially chose to weave Abraham and his family into the scarlet thread of our redemption. It was through Abraham's descendants that the Jewish nation would arise. And One of his descendants would be the Savior, not only for the Jews but for the whole world! Remember Genesis 3:15!**

**When God called Abram he was living in the city of Ur sometime around 2,000 BC. Ur was located in the region of what is now modern day Iraq. Joshua 24:2 tells us that Abraham and his father worshiped idols: “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.”**

**The main idol of worship in Ur was Nanna, the moon god. The moon was worshiped as the power that controlled the heavens and the life cycle on earth. Prayers and offerings were literally offered to the moon to invoke its blessing.**

**So Abraham wasn’t just called out of Ur to go to the Promised Land, he was called out of darkness into light, out of idolatry into the worship of the true God just like us! The writer of Hebrews says:**

**“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.”**

**He didn’t know where he was going, but he moved forward in faith, trusting God’s word, and was willing to renounce his idolatry to follow the true God.**

**Genesis 12:2-3 contain the 3rd Bible covenant—the Abrahamic Covenant:**

**“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:2-3).**

**The Abrahamic Covenant is an *unconditional covenant*, no strings attached. God will raise up a nation through which Messiah will come and no man or devil will stop it.**

**And notice how the last part of the verse contains the continuation of Genesis 3:15 and God’s covenant promise to send *the bruiser of Satan’s head*. “...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” How will all the families of the earth be blessed? By Messiah Jesus, the light of the world!**

**The Bible goes on to say that Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6).**

**After this incredible blessing, God goes on to tell Abraham that circumcision would be the seal and reminder of the covenant, and so all of Abraham's male descendants would be circumcised to remind them that God would someday fulfill all the promises that He made to Abraham.**

**But it is in Genesis 15 that Abraham is declared righteous before God according to his faith. And it is Chapter 17 where circumcision is introduced as the seal of the Abrahamic covenant. So Abraham believed *before* he was circumcised. *Faith* came before *works*.**

**This is a crucial point that Paul makes in the book of Romans. Salvation is by grace through faith alone. Paul writes:**

**“Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith” (Ro. 4:11).**

**This is why Abraham is called the father of our faith. He was declared righteous by faith, not works. In the same way, every born again child of God is declared righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, not by any of their own works:**

**“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8).**

**Now, when Isaac was born it was essentially a miraculous birth. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 years old. They were both well beyond their reproductive years: “Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; *and* Sarah had passed the age of childbearing” (Gen 18:11).**

**But God had already said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called” (Heb. 11:18). Isaac was the promised seed—the seed through which Messiah Jesus would come. So Isaac’s miraculous birth once again pointed to the ultimate miraculous birth of Messiah Jesus, born of a virgin!**

**The Bible says that as Abraham grew stronger in faith, God one day told him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering to prove his faith (Gen 22). Abraham obeyed and brought Isaac to Mount Moriah, laid him on the altar, and at the last minute the Lord told him not to kill Isaac and gave him a ram for the sacrifice.**

**Here we see Abraham's faith at peak strength. The Bible records, “Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death” (Heb 11:19).**

**And this event provides a beautiful foreshadowing of Jesus Christ offered up by the Heavenly Father for the sins of mankind.**

**Abraham went on to grow so close to the Lord that the Bible calls him a “friend of God.” The Prophet Isaiah writes, "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend” (41:8).**

**Now, as God’s redemption plan continues to unfold, the chosen seed, Isaac, marries Rebekah and has two sons—Jacob and Esau. In cahoots with Rebekah (who loved Jacob more than Esau) they hatch a plan to deceive Isaac and cause him to bless Jacob with the blessing of the firstborn, which was Esau’s by birth.**

**After they succeed, Jacob flees to his uncle Laban in Haran to avoid Esau’s wrath. While there, Jacob is himself deceived into marrying Leah, one of Laban’s daughters, but not the one he wanted. He then also marries Rachel, the one he wanted. From these two women and two of their maidservants, Jacob sires the 12 heads of the future 12 tribes of Israel.**

**This marks the ongoing formation of what will become a mighty nation of Hebrew people. Keep in mind—this is the onward outworking of Genesis 3:15. We have moved from the promise of a Redeemer, to Noah and his son, Shem and the chosen lineage, to Abraham and the beginning of the nation through which Messiah would come.**

**Now, after God assures Abram (before he is called Abraham—‘father of many’—in chapter 17) that he will indeed have a child, He tells Abram what will take place with his future descendants:**

**15:13-14 “Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs (Egypt), and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.’”**

**This is an amazing prophecy that we know in hindsight was fulfilled to the letter. The Twelve sons of Jacob, starting with Joseph, are brought to Egypt by the sovereign hand of God and there they multiply into a mighty nation.**

**A pharaoh that doesn’t know them becomes threatened by their numbers and brings them into hard bondage and slavery. After 400 years, God speaks to Moses out of the burning bush, which brings us to the next covenant and the next step in God’s plan of redemption—the Mosaic covenant. We’ll pick that up next time!**