

I. Understanding Covenants

- A. We are most familiar today with the covenant of marriage. It’s more than a legal, contractual obligation: it is a public ceremony and celebration that communicates a commitment that is being made between the bride and groom.
- B. Covenant is more than a legal contract, but a ceremonial event that demonstrates absolute fidelity and guarantees faithfulness to the terms of the covenant.
- C. Ancient Near East cultures observed and celebrated a wide variety of covenants.
- D. Scripture makes the importance of covenants clear for us:

*“<sup>7</sup>He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. <sup>8</sup>**He remembers his covenant forever**, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, <sup>9</sup>the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, <sup>10</sup>which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, <sup>11</sup>saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.’” (Ps. 105:7-11)*

- E. Most people can grasp the idea of God being faithful to people, but we often get tripped up over the idea of God being faithful concerning *land*. But Psalm 105 is telling us that the land is a big part of His everlasting covenant with Israel.
  - 1. Scripture conveys that people and land aren’t separate when it comes to covenant.

II. God’s Covenant With Abraham

- A. Genesis 12 – seven-fold blessing that speaks of Abraham’s family being blessed, unto blessing all the families of the earth; call to move to a new land (v.1-3).
- B. Genesis 15 – promise of numerous offspring, and that they would possess the land he was now residing in, Canaan (v.1-7).
  - 1. This is where we see the faith righteousness of Abraham (still Abram at this point).

*“And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15:6)*

- a. Paul points to this story in both Romans and Galatians to make an important point: this occurred *before* Abraham was circumcised. This makes him the father of both the circumcised and those who believe in God.

*“<sup>15</sup>To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. <sup>16</sup>Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ. <sup>17</sup>This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. <sup>18</sup>For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.” (Gal. 3:15-18)*

2. Abram asks God, “how am I to know I will possess this land?” Instead of answering the question about the land, God instructs Abraham to gather some animals (v.9). Seems strange to us, but Abram knew it was to perform a covenant ceremony.
  - a. In this ceremony – “passing through the pieces” – the two parties would walk between the pieces of the dead animals to signify they would follow through with their side of the covenant.
  - b. Jer. 34:8-17 – those who pass through the pieces bind themselves in a covenant, saying: “if I don’t fulfill the terms of this covenant, may I be made like these dead animals – food for the birds of the air.” It is an act of binding oneself by a curse, which is a very strong gesture.
3. God immobilizes Abram, telling him what will happen with the following generations of his offspring. Then *God passes through the pieces Himself.*

*“<sup>17</sup>When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup>On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, <sup>19</sup>the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup>the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup>the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.” (Gen. 15:17-21)*

- a. The smoking fire pot and flaming torch – smoke and fire often appear as visible manifestations of God’s glory. The smoking and flaming fire pot was God Himself passing through the pieces in the covenant ceremony.
4. The point: Abram was unable to walk through the pieces. God walked through the pieces alone, binding Himself to a curse, to demonstrate to Abram the permanent nature of this covenant.
  - a. “If I don’t give you and your offspring this land, may I be made food for the birds of the air like these dead animals.”

III. Why Pray for Israel?

- A. The serious nature of this covenant shows us the high priority this has before the Lord.
- B. “Whenever God chooses one, it’s always on behalf of the many.” God’s choosing of Abraham is not for his sake alone, but for the sake of others. This choosing of Abraham is a part of God’s plan for the world. To pray for Abraham’s descendants is to pray for God’s plan for the world.