

# **“I Promise: The God of Covenant”**

## **Study Guide May 31, 2009**

### **Genesis 15-22, Unlocking the Old Testament**

One of the key aspects of Reformed theology (the theology that we hold to in the Presbyterian Church) is the aspect of *covenant theology*. A *covenant* is a promissory relationship entered into by two or more people. An example of a covenant can be anything from a business contract to a marriage relationship. What we see in the life of Abraham (who prior to Genesis 17 is known as Abram) is that God establishes a covenant with Abraham and his decedents (of which we are included). This covenant however is different than earthly covenants and we want to understand in this passage the covenantal nature of God and its implications for our lives.

1. If you are reading these questions prior to the message, then read or skim Genesis 15-22 to get an overview of life of Abraham.
  
2. There are 2-3 initiations of God’s covenant with Abraham. Most people count Genesis 12:1-3 as the first part of the covenant. The second is Genesis 15:1-7. The third is Genesis 17:1-15. Take a moment to really read those passages.
  - a. What are the promises that God makes to Abraham?
  
  - b. Although God’s promise is with Abraham, because we are the decedents of Abraham, how can these promises be translated to us?
  
3. There were 13 years between God’s promise of a child through Sarah in Genesis 15 and God’s promises that were reiterated and enhanced in Genesis 17:1-15. Yet Abraham was 99 years old and still had no child.
  - a. Why do you think God waited so long to fulfill his promise of a child?
  
  - b. What would Abraham and Sarah have had thought when God made these great promises and yet took so long to deliver?
  
  - c. Has God ever told you in your life to “wait”? What did God teach you during that time? (Or what could He have taught you?)
  
4. As you look at the covenant language in Genesis 15:1-7 and Genesis 17:1-15, what are the responsibilities of God and what are the responsibilities of Abraham?
  
5. A text that causes people a tremendous amount of difficulty is when God calls Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22:1-19 (although notice that Abraham doesn’t actually have to sacrifice Isaac).

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- a. Why would God call Abraham to do such a thing?
  - b. Read Hebrews 11:17-19 what did Abraham expect to happen if he had to sacrifice his son?
6. While Abraham is a patriarch of the faith, he wasn't perfect.
  - a. Either from the Sunday message or from reading the chapters, what mistakes did Abraham make?
  - b. How also did Abraham exhibit faith and obedience?
  - c. What does this say about the way God can use imperfect people?
7. Abraham is told to circumcise himself and everybody that comes into his fold.
  - a. What is the reason for this sign?
    - b. The Jewish people ended up putting however more emphasis on the sign of circumcision than on the way their lives should be changed by that circumcision. So what does Paul tell the Romans about what is really true “circumcision”? (See Romans 2:25-29)
    - b. Since we believe baptism replaces circumcision (see Col 2:11-12) how do all of these passages that we have looked at in this question influence our understanding of baptism and give us warning?
1. God's first words to Abram (who later becomes Abraham) were to leave his country and his family to go to an unknown destination. When was a time when you have had to leave a place where you were comfortable (or the comfortable situation left you)? How did it feel? Looking back what did you learn or could you have learned through that process?
2. In Genesis 12:2, what are the three things that God promises to do for Abram? What do those three things mean?
3. In what ways has God blessed you?

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**Genesis 15-22, Unlocking the Old Testament**

4. Genesis 12:2 says that God blessed Abram so that He can bless others? Read the following passages. What does it mean to bless others? (Isaiah 58:6-8, Micah 6:8, 1 Peter 2:9, Isaiah 42:6-9, Matthew 5:43-48, Matthew 22:34-40)

5. One way that the church has often seen its role is to minister to people who come to them. But scripture emphasizes our need to go and minister to people in the world. Notice for example God didn't say to Abram "I will send people to you for you to bless them, but that you will go and be a blessing as you go." The great commission says "**GO** and make disciples." God has already sent you into your communities, into your places of work and He has sent you there to be a demonstration of His love. With that understanding, who (specifically or generally) might God be sending you too in order to be a demonstration of His love?

6. Another pattern that I see in our lives (mine as well) is that we want to serve in the name of Jesus where it is comfortable. Yet Jesus never tells us it is going to be comfortable to serve in His name, in fact he tells us it is going to be costly.

a. What are the costs of authentically following Jesus? Matthew 10:37-39, 2 Timothy 3:12, John 15:18, 19

b. What costs are you willing to pay? What costs are you not willing to pay? Be honest!

7. Finally, what I see is that even though we have to risk and even though it will cost us, the power of God's Spirit is with us. Abram, which means "father of many" didn't have a child with Sarah for many years (Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 100, Genesis 21:5). Why did God wait so long (15 years) to begin to deliver the promise of a child for Sarah and Abraham? How does this give you encouragement as you live missionally for the Lord?

8. What are two or three things you can do to begin to live as God's person sent into your context to bring about God's purposes?