

The Covenant with Abraham Sermon
Sermon Prepared for WellSpring Church
July 17, 2011
Genesis 15

Prayer:
Markian and Yonna flying alone from Ukraine
Holly

Subject: The Word of God—His spoken and written commands and promises
Complement: Is often fixed with a sign (Symbol)
Big Idea; Faith is fixing our hearts and minds on the word of God which is strengthened by signs.

1. Introduction
 - a. Engage
 - b. Review
 - i. Why studying the Covenants?
 1. To see how God has shown his faithfulness to his people through the ages.
 2. To show the unfolding story of salvation—from the fall onwards –in relationship to the promise of Genesis 3:15.
 - ii. What is a Covenant in the Context of the Bible and its historical setting? Let's Look quickly at the Hittite Suzerainty Covenant
 1. When: Second Millennium B.C. (Meaning 2000→1000 B.C.)
 2. Why: To establish treaties of loyalty, protection and kingdom building.
 3. What
 - a. Preamble—Identifies the Covenant maker
 - b. Historical Narrative/Prologue
 - c. Stipulations/Conditions
 - d. Witnesses (generally the gods)
 - e. Sanctions: blessings and curses
 - f. Deposit of copies of the Covenant. (Generally with the gods)
 - g. Oaths of Obedience (almost never an oath by the Suzerain—but by the vassal
 - iii. We have looked at
 1. Adam—eat and die
 2. Noah: Rainbow

3. Babel-scattering, but also the hubris of man thinking that he can stand against God
 - a. Hurricane
 - b. Tornado
- c. Preview: Today we will continue to see how God unfolds his plan and establishes his faithfulness to the man he has chosen and given promises to: Abram
 - i. Idol worshipper
 - ii. called
 - iii. elect of God
- d.
- e. Read text Genesis 15
- f. Big Idea: The Word of God is a sure foundation, a secure promise, a trustworthy guide—By itself it is always enough, but God in his grace attaches signs to secure the word to us.
2. “After these things”—Setting
 - a. Original Call in Gen. 12:1-3
 - i. Purely sovereign grace—God chooses whom he will for his own good pleasure. We may not want to accept or believe election but this is the way of God. See Deut. 7
 - ii. must have been more than a voice in the night
 - iii. The call came with a promise
 1. Progeny
 2. Land
 3. Blessing
 - b. Abram obeyed and eventually settled near two towns named Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 13:10-12
 - c. Lot Captured. There was a rebellion. 5 kings against 4.
 - i. Seems a covenant treaty was broken
 - ii. in the war Chedorlaomer calls on his allies to quell the rebellion of his vassals.
 - iii. Lot was captured
 - d. Abram to the Rescue Genesis 14:14-15
 - e. Home again
 - f. God comes to Abram in a vision (Words at night, not a dream, not something seen).
3. The first move here is God’s—isn’t always? God always takes the initiative. God speaks. The word is given, fear is addressed for the purpose of having fear dispelled: “Fear Not” here is the first time that we have this most frequent command in Scripture (nearly 180x).
 - a. Why might Abram need to hear this? There are several suggestions and it may be that the answer is a combination of some of them.
 - i. Don’t be afraid of retaliation from Chedorlaomer for your rescue of Lot and the booty from Sodom and Gomorrah.

- ii. Don't be afraid of new enemies—Calvin: success brings new enemies, remember he is a foreigner as well, challenges from other tribal chiefs.
 - iii. Don't fear man in either the sense of being afraid of what he will do or seeking his praises. We aren't always afraid of what man might do to hurt us, but we are often afraid of the withdrawal of men's praise.
 - iv. Calvin even adds that this may be a warning to Abram not to trust in himself at this point. There is certainly a temptation to headiness and pride ere after this stunning victory.
 - v. Don't be afraid of God-- Genesis 15:1 suggests that it is not nearly as fearful to meet an antagonist on the battlefield as it is to encounter the deity in a *vision*. Abram may confront Chedolaomer and live, but can he confront Yahweh and live?" (Hamilton, Genesis 1-17)
 - vi. Don't be afraid to trust the promises of God.
 - vii. The words "Fear not" are often given to the people of God when an enemy is being encountered, a task is being given, or when God sends an angelic messenger. All three are combined here. The enemy Chedolaomer is a possible threat, God is going to re-state Abram's duty to wait for the promise, and He himself appears to Abram in the Vision. See
 - 1. Genesis 26:24; 46:3
 - 2. Numbers 21:34; Deut. 1:21; 3:2; 7:18; Josh 8:1; 10:8; 11:6; Isaiah 7:4; 10:24
 - 3. Josh 1:6-9
 - 4. Acts 18:9; 23:11; 27:23
- b. Fear not because I am your shield and your exceedingly great reward
- i. Shield—
 - 1. Deliverer I will deliver
 - 2. Protection, I will protect
 - ii. Reward—exceedingly great reward.

"I am thy shield and thy exceeding great Reward." We would fain tarry and extract some of the sweetness of these words. This is a special promise applicable to those who are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." It is God's word to those who "choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" for they have "respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:25, 26). Unto such, God promises to be their Shield, their Defense, the One behind whom faith shelters and trusts; as well as their Reward, their exceeding great Reward. So it was with our blessed Lord Himself. Refusing to accept from Satan the kingdoms of the world and their glory, He could say, "The Lord is the portion of Mine inheritance, and of My cup" (Ps. 16:5).

1. Remember, no matter what you have (success, riches, honors, rights, privileges) You got them from God.
 2. But Abram wants to know, “What good is the reward of inheritance if there are no children?”
 3. What am I going to do about a son? This is part of the promise. So far I have heard and obeyed your call but I have not seen the promise fulfilled.
 4. What else do I care about if I have no children—what
 5. How do I count on your many large promises if there hasn’t yet been the fulfillment of even this one small promise? All I have is a slave to adopt as a son, and he is not even a part of our people, he is a foreigner, an alien.
- c. It looks like Abram is afraid that God is not going to come through.
- i. I might ask here, what are you waiting for from God that is keeping you from enjoying his blessings to you?
 1. Marriage
 2. Children
 3. financial relief
 4. health, healing
 5. salvation of loved ones?
 - ii. How should we respond? Look to the Word of God
 1. In the past:
 - a. Joshua 21:45; 23:14
 - b. Psalm 146:3ff
 - c. Isaiah 55:11
 2. Promises
 - a. II Cor. 1:20
 - b. II Peter 3:9
 - c. Isa, 43: Through the waters
 - d. Roamns 8:28 Good
 - e. II Cor. 12 My Grace is sufficient for you.
 - iii. Here is a great challenge for us in times of fear and doubt: See that God often withholds the immediate fulfillment of his promise to see that the God of the promise is better than the promise of God. This is what the Writer of the Hebrews is telling us in Hebrews 11:7-10. “Had the promises been fulfilled immediately they themselves would have become more important that the relationship that God want to sustain in them, (See G. Vos, Biblical Theology, 87)
- d. Why do I need to hear the commandment to Fear not?
- i. I need to hear it when we get new information about my lifes.
 - ii. Nothing has changed in your relationship to the promises of God
 - iii. Nothing has changed in God’s commitment to you his child
 - iv. The only thing that has changed is that you have new information about your situation.

- v. When the old information doesn't seem to be working.
- 4. Faith Exercised—The Word of God is accepted, believed, received. God's answer to Abram is to show him the stars. The promise of God pierces the darkness of our doubt and fear like the stars in the night sky. Look
 - a. Abram believed God—
 - i. Abram stayed himself upon God.
 - ii. He staggered not at the promises of God through unbelief
 - b. What is this faith?
 - i. Taking God at his word
 - ii. believing the spoken word of God—note this is more often general and not specific. We need to be careful about taking specific promises to a person and applying them to our selves and our situation today—Find the general promises and principles.
 - iii. it is also a desire for more faith. Gerhardus Vos says, "Faith and an desire for more faith frequently go hand in hand." (p. 83)
 - iv. Faith needs to be increased and strengthened because the tests increase as we walk along the road with God. Even after God gave Abram a Son. My faith needs to be strengthened and renewed because I am weak, life is hard. (Proverb 17:3)
 - 1. He was still a wanderer and a pilgrim
 - 2. he was still an alien in the land
 - 3. he was asked to give up the son
 - 4. See Acts 7:5; Heb. 11:9

"He who begins by faith must continue by faith, for faith is the principle not only of initiation but also of perseverance. The life of faith did not cease Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldees behind him or when at length he set foot on the territory toward which he had directed his steps. Indeed, the situation into which he moved on his arrival in the land of promise was a more sever trial of his faith than was the call to leave home and kindred, and it was easier for him to live by faith as he journeyed toward a goal as yet unseen than to do so upon reaching this goal and finding that the fullness of all that had been promised was 'not yet.'" Philip Hughes, Commentary on Hebrews)

- c. What was its reward? Righteousness (Romans 4:5)
- d. How do we need to apply this now?
 - i. There is no forgiveness, reconciliation, or justification without righteousness
 - ii. There is no righteousness without faith.
 - iii. What is this faith? It is believing and agreeing with God about
 - 1. You as a creature
 - 2. you and your attempts to exclude God from your life
 - 3. your attempts to use God according to your own design
 - 4. your attempts to impress God with you good deeds
 - 5. your attempts to hide from him when
 - 6. your attempts to argue with his ways

- 7. your attempts to set your self up as the authority and center of meaning in your life
 - iv. The consequences of your wrong response to God
 - v. The only solution in Jesus Christ.
 - vi. There is no application of righteousness without this faith.
 - 5. The Word is signified and the Future Secured
 - a. God made covenant with Abram.
- v.18 the first mention of b'rit occurs in 15:18
 what is b'rit?
 How is this different from 1285 used in Gen. 6:18? there the word is *beriyth* which is actually the word for treaty, alliance, covenant used 264 times in OT.

The Covenant ritual in 15:8 is odd to us and presented without any explanation of commentary—speaks of antiquity and familiarity of the first audience/readers

- b. Abram seeks a sign—How shall I *know*?
- c. What do we see in this covenant [renewal?] ceremony?
 - i. Prologue: “I am the Lord”
 - ii. Historical Narrative: I am the Lord *Who broght you our ...*”
 - iii. stipulations—believe my word to you
 - iv. sanctions
 - v. Ratification
 - 1. Animals split
 - a. clean, i.e. looking forward to the animals of sacrifice
 - b.
 - 2. darkness and dread
 - vi. imprecation and curse—walk after me, in my ways
 - 1. The light as the presence of God
 - 2. Walking between the animals symbolic
- d. God told Abram much more of the future—“the inheritance can be reached only through suffering.
- e. God gave Abram a sign—
 - i. the Smoking pot and the fire
 - ii. later Chp. 17—Circumcison
 - 1. Cutting as a sign of imprecation
 - 2. Cutting as a sign of separation from the peoples of the earth
 - 3. Cutting as a sign that the Seed is the source of the sin nature (not sex as bad or dirty-never in the OT)
 - 4. Cutting as a sign as a daily reminder to the man of his need for God, his sin, the promise of seed, the threat of “cutting off”
- f. He also gives us signs
 - i. Baptism to look back and remember that it is by Christ alone I am washed, cleansed, raised to new life

ii. Lord's Supper—faithful and jst.

6. Some applications

- a. We are all given to fear
- b. We are all called to believe the promises
- c. There is only one promise that secures the righteousness of Christ.
- d. The pilgrimage of faith is hard and long and harder the longer it goes.
- e. God's promises will come to be.