

DATE: September 28, 2008

TEXT: Genesis 15:1-6, 17-19

TITLE: "Genesis XII: The Covenant"



Twenty eight years ago my wife and I stood in a church on our wedding day. We were dressed up in fancy clothes. We had witnesses of many friends and family. Two ministers stood before us. I turned to Kim and shared my vows with her. Vows that I had written promising love, support and Christian leadership. She turned to me and shared vows that she had written. Again vowing love and support. From a biblical point of view what was happening on this day? We were making a covenant. To be exact, we were making a suntheke covenant. That is a covenant between two equal people. A covenant to surrender our rights as individuals and place the other person in a greater position than ourselves. Both vowing to build up and encourage the other person.

About 6 years later my wife sat in an office of an attorney. The attorney was a friend of ours. We were drawing up a will. We kind of laughed because the only things we owned was a 15 year old car and Salvation Army acquired furniture. But we were making a will.... primarily

for the care of our children in the event of our death. Biblically what were we doing? We were making a covenant. This is called a diatheke covenant. This is a covenant made between two unequal partners. The will was a covenant between Kim and I as parents and Adam and Erin. They had no choice of guardians unless they were old enough to make their own decision. They had no choice they had to inherit our 15 year old car when they were babies. Today they could, if they choose, turn down the assets of Kim and I if we were to die. An other word for a diatheke covenant is a will or a testament (as in a “last will and testament”)

What we are seeing in our text this morning is the making of a diatheke covenant. It is between God and humanity. It is between God and Abraham and his family. I will share 4 lesson on Covenant is scripture.

**Lesson # 1** What is the importance of covenants? Simply put... they are the central idea of scripture. There is a reason the Bible is broken down into the New Testament (or Covenant) and the Old Testament (or Covenant). The entire Bible is based on the idea of covenant. The amazing truth is this.... God has made a covenant (a testament) with people. Let me say this... it

is a unequal covenant. God does not need people. As a matter of fact ... I am amazed God made a covenant with people. Again and again we reject Him. Again and again we deny Him. Again and Again we ignore Him. Yet He keeps coming back and makes a covenant with humanity.

The amazing love and grace of God. I scripture there a number of covenants...

God made a Covenant with Noah to not destroy the world by water again  
 God made a covenant with Abraham to make him the father of a great nation  
 God made a covenant with Moses that we call the 10 Commandments  
 God made a covenant with David that the Kingdom would arise from him  
 God made a Covenant with Jesus to establish a new covenant for all people.

But it is important to understand that all these covenants have been group into two great covenants... the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. But also understand this...they are all examples of the Covenant of Grace. All of these promises are promises of God's grace and love. It is by Grace, empowered by the cross of Jesus, we are saved. It is by grace that Abraham was saved. It is by grace that Noah was saved. It is by grace that we are saved. God promises His grace...that is His unconditional love... to his children.

**Lesson # 2** Notice the wonderful promises of God to Abraham and the need for Abraham to accept the promises. This is most specific in *Genesis 17: 1ff*

**When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. 2 I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." 3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."**

Notice the wonderful promises of God to Abraham. First, he would be the father of many nations. Kings would arise from his descendants. Second, notice the promise of intimacy. He would be their God. There is a wonderful promise of spiritual intimacy. This is an amazing, wonderful promise. Finally, God promises to Abraham land that would be theirs. This was especially important to Moses as he led his people in the wilderness as he wrote this book.

But also notice the need for Abraham to accept this covenant. *Genesis 15:6*

**"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness"**

also in *Genesis 17:9* we read this...

**9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.**

Circumcision was to be the outward sign of acceptance of God covenant. The point is

this.... covenants must be accepted. We see that throughout the rest of the Old Testament just because a person was a descendant of Abraham... and just because they were circumcised, they were not necessarily children of God. There has to be an acceptance of the covenant.

The same is true today. How do you become a child of the covenant today? *John 1:11-13*

*gives the answer...*

**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.**

We receive the new covenant by surrendering our lives to Jesus Christ. Not just intellectual belief...not just a casual glance in the direction of Christ... a surrender of all of our lives. What is the sign of our being part of the new Covenant.. It is no longer circumcision...it the receiving of the Holy Spirit into our lives. He seals our intimacy with God our Father. We receive the blessing of God. But there is another point I need to make.

**Lesson #3** Notice how a covenant was sealed at the time of Abraham. We find this wonderful story in *Genesis 15*

**8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"<sup>9</sup> So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."<sup>10</sup> Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other;.....<sup>17</sup> When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.<sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram**

You need to understand this. When two kings would make a covenant to seal the covenant they would take a goat or a sheep cut it in half and walk together between the pieces. When they do this, they are saying... **"I make this agreement with you... if I do not keep this agreement may what happened to these animals happen to me."** That is the sealing and the signing of the contract. You say to yourself "that is awful gross." Children still make promises to each other and seal these promises with this saying ... **Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye."** Now that is a serious promise.

Understand this... the smoking fire pot I just read about in Genesis is God... it is a Christopheny.. An appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. God made this walk himself. He is saying... if this covenant is broken by what happened to the animals happen to me. But understand this....God has kept his covenant with us.... but Abraham and his descendants have

broken the covenant. Because the covenant was broken a price had to be paid. The amazing truth is this... a blood price was paid... but not by the person who broke the covenant... the blood price was paid by God Himself on the cross of Jesus Christ. Remember the words of Jesus Christ as he was giving communion.....**“this cup is the new covenant in my blood.”** The death of Christ on the cross did two things... it paid the price for our broken covenant with God and it establishes a new covenant between us and our Lord. This moves us to our final lesson for this morning

**Lesson # 4** We are now the recipients of the covenant of Abraham based upon the covenant of Christ. This is the central teaching of Paul in the book of Romans. *In Romans 4* Paul gives this promise....

**It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. .... 16Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations."..... 23The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification**

Here is the wonderful, wonderful news.... we are the recipients of the New Covenant given

to us by Jesus Christ. The promise of the new covenant is this... we shall be His people and he shall be our God. Do you understand that... we are the people of God. We are the children of God.

The righteousness of Christ is credited to us. That was the miracle of the Covenant with Abraham and that is the miracle of the new Covenant in Christ. His righteousness is given to us.

We are the children of his promises... His covenant. We are the children of Abraham and the Children of Christ. Praise be to God

AMEN