

GENESIS

Lesson 11 - Chapter 12

READ GEN 12:1-3

God, Adonai (means Lord or Master), makes a covenant with Abraham (still called Avram at this moment). This covenant occurs while Abraham was residing in Haran, up in Mesopotamia. And, basically what occurs is that God tells Abraham to leave Haran, and go where God will guide him..... and God says, by the way, your father and your father's other relatives are not welcome to go along. I suspect what we see here is that since Terach apparently went part way and then decided against following God any further, God used somebody who WOULD go that whole 9 yards.... Abraham. Partial obedience isn't a little obedience..... it's DISobedience. And, so we see God again dividing, electing, and separating.

What I would like to do, now, is to take a little time with this covenant; to explain both what this covenant is about, and to explain the general nature of covenants in bible times.

God gives Abraham an instruction, and He follows it up with a promise; a promise that consists of several parts. Of course the instruction is that Abraham should leave the area he is in (Haran), go to a place God will show him, AND to separate himself from his father and brother. God then issues a set of promises that consist of the following:

1. God will make Abraham and his descendants into a great nation.

This means that Abraham and his descendants are going to become a people; by definition a separate nation, one that up to that point didn't exist. And, if that is to happen, then Abraham and Sarai must have children, and their children must have children, and lots of descendants after them to the point that some time in the future, there will be a sufficient number of these descendants, who remain identified with one another, to be counted as a "nation".

1. God would bless Abraham and Abraham himself would be a blessing.

In other words, God is going to give Abraham His favor. Abraham is going to be treated as special by God, and some wonderful things are going to happen to him that he doesn't deserve, but God has chosen to do it anyway. What God does for Abraham is going to benefit more than just Abraham. What Abraham does in obedience to God is going to, *itself*, be a blessing to others.

1. God will bless those who bless Abraham and God will curse those who curse Abraham.

I wish I had a flashing red light and a siren to announce this verse. This is not some set of idle words. This is not God being condescending to Abraham, nor patting him on his head like we would a little child, trying to make him feel good. This is a serious warning; not to Abraham, but to all the peoples of the world, from that moment forward: God expects people to recognize that Abraham is chosen of God, and he is to be respected and honored. On the flip side, God will take it personally if anyone should decide to be an enemy of Abraham. That is, God will judge those that line up against Abraham.

But, let me take that one step further. Remember, in bible language God is not just referring to Abraham himself. He is speaking of Abraham's line; even more specifically, of the special nation that will come from Abraham..... his descendants. Now, who are those descendants that form that special nation? We will soon see that this covenant nation is Israel. Abraham would eventually have many children, out of which only one, however, was the line that would lead to Israel. So, not all of Abraham's descendants have this special blessing and warning attached. I pointed out earlier that God has already laid out the pattern for this concept: He divides, He elects, and He separates. Abraham came from the line of Peleg, who was divided and elected from the line of Shem, who was divided and elected from the line of Noach, who was divided and elected from the line of Seth, who was divided and elected from the line of Adam. In time, as Abraham has sons, we will see one particular son divided, elected and separated away from the others. The RESULT of this God-Process of dividing, selecting, and electing, is what we often hear called "the line of promise". Typically this line of promise is considered to start with Abraham, but the bible shows us that in reality it goes all the way back to Seth.

1. God will make the name of Abraham great.

Abraham is going to be greatly rewarded. And, his name is going to be lifted high among men. Remember, where it says "name" we really ought to think "reputation" in our modern Western culture. God will make the reputation of Abraham great. What is fascinating is that even in our time, 4000 years later, more than half the population of this planet is represented by the 3 great monotheistic religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, in which Abraham is the revered patriarch of each of these.

1. God will use Abraham to bless all the families of the earth.

What God is going to do through Abraham is not going to bless just Abraham, nor just his descendants, nor just the special nation that will come from this blessing: Israel. This blessing, brought about through Abraham's selection, is going to benefit all mankind.

NOTE: GO TO THE SECTION MARKED WEEK 7, COVENANTS

Let's take a look, now, at what a covenant is. Of all the Biblical principles, covenant is the one we need understand best because it is through the process of covenant that God's set-apart people (Israel) were created, and through covenant that by trust in God...namely in Yeshua.....we can be saved. Webster's dictionary defines a covenant as a binding agreement, and as an agreement among church members to defend and maintain its doctrines. It also describes a "covenant" as a formal contract.

Without doubt, these definitions pretty well nail down the Western culture, 21st century, idea of just what a covenant is, and what we, as Christians, generally picture in our minds when the word “covenant” is used. But, Webster’s misses the mark substantially when compared to what a covenant, in biblical terms and times, meant, and still means; that is, what GOD means by a covenant. First and foremost, a covenant was sacred.

In Bible times, covenants between men were used to sell land, to make alliances, to make war and peace, even to make provision for the using of a water well by someone other than its owner. A covenant could be by mutual agreement, in which BOTH parties had obligations to fulfill; Or..... just as often, it signified an obligation only upon ONE party, and even could be IMPOSED upon someone by a more powerful person or nation.....or by God Himself.

We tend to think of a covenant as a promise or a contract, and how its effect is dealt with within the framework of our judicial system. Therefore we picture a covenant as human agreements, written by human hands, and enforced by human means. We all know that time, or people, or circumstances can cause oral promises as well as written contracts to terminate, or change, or to simply become obsolete. Penalties for breaking a contract are usually small in our society, and normally involve a monetary settlement; they happen every day. A court of law can invalidate or change a contract. Men and women break personal promises on a fairly consistent basis. Governments can form a constitution, their contract with the people, then amend it, or even throw it all away and start over. People can, mutually or unilaterally, change their minds and simply dissolve or disavow a contract or a promise..... like in divorce, with relatively little penalty. None of this is possible within the Biblical definition of a covenant.

The Hebrew word for covenant is B’rit, which comes from the Hebrew root word Barah, which means to “cut or divide”..... and I’ll show you the relevance of that meaning shortly. The Greek word used in the Bible for covenant is “diatheke”, and this Greek word misses the mark rather substantially as a translation of the word B’rit. I’ve taught you on a number of occasions that culture and language come as a package; and that within any given culture they have a number of traditions, and ideas, and basic concepts that are unique to their culture, and therefore foreign to all others. Since that is the case, there are many uniquely Hebrew concepts....such as the concept embodied in the Hebrew word B’rit or Shalom or Messiah.....that don’t have parallels in another language or culture. Think about that for a moment; because unless you’re a language expert, it isn’t readily apparent to most of us that there are words in one language, which don’t directly correspond to a word in another language. That is, we can’t just make a list of Hebrew words, and easily make a list alongside of their equivalent English words. As a matter of fact, it takes approximately 1/3rd more English than Hebrew words to say the same thing. A Hebrew Bible is only about 2/3rds of the number of pages of an English Bible. That should be a clue about translation difficulties right there. Let me illustrate this for you; for instance, **Yom** in Hebrew means **day** in English. It is the same concept, and both English and Hebrew have the common and straightforward concept of a 24 hour period of time, one full rotation of the earth, and they each have a word to concisely describe that concept: in Hebrew it is Yom, in English it is day, so no problem. But, with the word “Shalom” in Hebrew, it contains an overall concept that doesn’t exist in either Greek or English speaking cultures. And, since the concept of Shalom doesn’t exist in Greek or English cultures, naturally there is no Greek or English word for it. So, the Bible translator

tries for something close to it; or he uses a series of words to try to get the concept across to the reader. With our example of Shalom, for instance, we often see the words “peace and grace” used in English to translate the single word “Shalom”. But, peace and grace just scratch the surface of what that single word “Shalom” means to the Hebrew mind.

More troublesome, though, is what happens when a translator has no understanding of the culture **behind** the language he is translating. You don’t need to be at all familiar with French Culture to learn to speak French. You don’t need to be familiar with Hebrew culture to learn Hebrew. The problem is, without uniting the understanding of the culture with the language, the translator will only understand what that word means in the context of his OWN cultural sense. And, that is the MAIN problem we have with Bible translation; precious few translators have ANY depth of knowledge of ancient Hebrew culture and concepts, and worse, often they have a built-in prejudice AGAINST the ancient Hebrews, and so goes forward with a negative view.

Many of us who have purchased small appliances or electronic widgets made in China often have found the accompanying instructions to sound odd or even pretty funny. I vividly recall being told in one manual that I was to tighten a screw until “it was happy”. Say what? How do I tell when the screw is happy? Of course, the idea was to tighten it until it was correct, or appropriate. And, in a dictionary, you’ll find that happy and correct have very similar meanings. But, for Americans **happy** is an emotion displayed by living creatures, not a technical term. So, the word **seems** right to the translator, but the concept is all fouled up. We have that exact problem in many places in the Bible. So, let’s get back to adjusting our understanding of just what a Biblical covenant actually is.

Partially because of the use of the Greek word **diatheke** in the NT, and also partially because the Hebrew concept of B’rit doesn’t have a direct parallel to either Greek or English speaking cultures, Christians have adopted the belief that what is being referred to is equivalent to our concept of a will (like in the sense of “last will and testament”). In fact, I have heard MANY sermons that seek to explain covenant in exactly those terms. Therefore, we have come to use the English word “testament” as in NT and OT, to describe the two halves of the Bible. And, boy, is that concept off the mark. No modern credible biblical scholar should defend using the Greek word **diatheke** or it’s English equivalent **testament** as a proper translation of B’rit (covenant). So, why do we continue to say OT/NT instead of Old Covenant, New Covenant..... habit, tradition, and an ignorance of just what a real Biblical covenant is in the first place.

One major difference between the typical Christian understanding of a covenant, and what God means by that word, is that a biblical covenant is a permanent thing unless it is conditional. We see both conditional and permanent covenants in the Bible. A permanent covenant cannot be retracted, a conditional covenant can. Another difference is that the penalty for breaking a biblical covenant was usually severe..... often, death. But, the overwhelming characteristic of a God-made biblical covenant as opposed to a covenant between men, or a even modern day promises or contracts, is that once God makes a covenant, it literally becomes a physical law of the universe: like gravity, or the speed of light, or the laws of Thermodynamics. In fact, the Hebrews themselves acknowledge this, because B’rit, their word for covenant, is also used to indicate the “laws of nature”. When God makes a covenant with His creation, that covenant is woven into the very fabric of both space and time;

it effects how the universe operates; and it also has an effect in the spiritual realm, because the spiritual realm is the SOURCE of a God-made covenant. Let me give you a detailed example of this covenant principle.

For instance: when God first made the universe, then man, there was no death. The laws of the universe (we might call them the laws of nature) were such that everything that was created was to exist forever. But, somewhere along the line, something changed. Our time together is such that I can't address the matter completely, and no matter what my thoughts are about it, they do contain some speculation because the Bible doesn't directly answer all of our questions about creation and death and decay. Nonetheless, we ARE told that death entered the world when Adam and Eve fell from grace. Did that mean universal death? Death of everything? Death of all stars and planets and moons and the sun and the earth itself? I don't think so. The Bible uses the term "death" as meaning the end of the life. If there is no life, then there can be no death because only living things die. Stars and moons and planets exist, but they are not "life". The death that the Bible is talking about as regards the fall of Man is the death of living things. So, if the Fall of Man didn't start the Universe decaying, then what did? In my estimation, the thing that started the Universe decaying is the very thing Adam's fall was patterned after; the fall of Lucifer, who came to be called Satan.

Let me introduce you briefly to the concept of patterns. This will be brief, and over time, I'll add to it. The common question we usually ask of any Biblical event or law or instruction or principle or decision, is WHY? Why is almost always the wrong question to ask about God-ordained things. "Why" is a Greek way of thinking. You generally won't find answers to WHY in the Bible, the way we have been taught to seek and discover WHY by using the scientific method...which is a Greek way of thinking. Rather, God instructs us by giving us patterns. He describes and explains an event, and later, a similar event will occur with a similar method and a similar outcome. The reason that the later event occurred the way it did was that it conformed to the pattern of the previous event. God's way of explanation is by means of exposing patterns, not by explaining WHY.

So, with the principle of patterns in mind, we know that Satan's fall occurred sometime **before** Adam's fall, obviously, because Satan was already exiled to planet earth by the time Adam was arrived. Satan's crime (pride and rebellion) against God occurred in the spiritual realm, not in the physical realm, right? But, all Biblical indications are that until Lucifer, called Satan, sinned against God, there was no evil in the spiritual realm. Yet, like so many spiritual matters, this one had its affects on the physical world as well.

Satan's fall initiated God changing the way His universe operated: after the fall, everything that existed would NOW start to deteriorate and die..... no exceptions. Adam and Eve arrived onto a planet, in a Universe, that was already decaying due to Satan's introduction of sin. He brought that with him when he was kicked out of Heaven, and sent to planet earth; where he lived in exile with his band of fallen angels. Then, sometime later when Adam and Eve arrived, Satan infected THEM with sin.....which brought death to the living creatures. Now, the WHOLE universe.....except for the Spirit realm.....was decaying. It is my contention that time began at the point of Satan's rebellion. As I told you in lesson 6, time is essentially the measurement of decay. If there is no decay, there is no time. We often hear scientists speak of how our

universe is aging: what they mean is, it's deteriorating, winding down. **Everything** in the universe is aging. On earth, wind and rain erode mountain chains and seashores. The Sun has a finite amount of fuel, and it will eventually run out. Every physical thing is slowly, but surely, dissolving back towards its basic elemental makeup. And spiritually, things also changed: evil was unleashed and it had to be dealt with because evil pollutes perfection, sin defiles God's personal holiness. A Savior had to be prepared to save man from complete annihilation. The Abyss had to be readied to imprison the leader of evil, Satan, at the appropriate time. Angels would eventually become warriors. Because sin had entered the world, death entered the world; first the fall of Satan and the decay of inanimate objects, then the fall of man and the decay of living creatures; prior to that there would have been no need for a "line of promise", for an immaculate conception, nor for a horrendous crucifixion. We, today, would not be preparing for a Rapture, while warning the unbelieving of Armageddon.

Here's another example that is an analogy of the effects of covenant: we all understand the effects of gravity, even if we don't understand how it works. What would happen if someday God deleted gravity as a physical law of the universe? Fortunately, at least until the new Heaven and Earth are created, gravity is a permanent law of nature..... it has no conditions or time limit that we are aware of. Well, gravity is the physical phenomenon that causes the moon to revolve around the earth, and the earth around the Sun. Our seasons, weather, and temperatures that stay within a certain range to afford life to survive; and photosynthesis that is the basis of plant life, all depend on our connection and relation to the Sun. Without gravity, that connection would be broken. We stay stuck to the earth, instead of floating away, because of gravity. When we drop a glass, it falls to the ground..... always. What if God simply decided one day, 'there shall be no more gravity'. Well, a lot would change, a chain reaction of monumental proportions, wouldn't it? The way the Universe operates would be entirely different.

What I'm getting at is that death and gravity are essentially covenants: universal laws upon which most other aspects of nature and Heaven depend; change one, and many others are affected. God made every one of the universal laws of spiritual and physical nature, and they all work together.... None were accidental. So, when God added decay, and then death to the equation, for instance, He changed a physical law of nature. And, this change also had its spiritual counterpart. Everything about the universe was changed to adapt to this new reality, spiritually AND physically. Do you see this? When God makes a covenant, any covenant, it's not like you or I promising to make payments on a car loan. Nor is it like human marriage vows. Some parts, if not all, of the vast body of spiritual and physical laws of the universe are affected when God makes a covenant. And, please understand me: this is not allegory nor illustration nor emotion nor exaggeration; when God makes a covenant, the spiritual and physical universe is never again the same.

Now, if God is to communicate with man it **MUST** be in terms MAN can understand. So, it seems that God created a kind of covenant **system**..... a visible, physical, tangible covenant protocol if you would, by which man could recognize and understand when God was creating a covenant, what its terms were, and (as much as a human can understand) its impact. And, mankind adopted a similar pattern for making agreements among ourselves.

Of course, in the Bible we see covenants made between humans, and we see covenants made by God, and as would be expected they look an awful lot alike in their format. The oldest, most primitive way of creating a covenant was called “cutting a covenant”.....Hebrew, “b’rit”, which means literally means, “cutting or dividing”. The earliest covenant making procedure happened by a representative of each side of a proposed covenant agreement cutting their arm with a knife, and then holding the cuts together to signify mixing the blood; or in some cultures, blood was actually sucked from each others’ wounds and ingested by the opposite party. Solemn oaths were sworn, invoking the name of the god each participant worshipped, because a covenant was sacred. In all cases, blood and a god were at the center of the ceremony.

In time, a different rite appeared, which involved cutting animals, instead of each other. And, generally, this cutting meant not just slashing an animal to draw blood, but literally killing it and cutting it up...dividing it; either into halves, or into several pieces. The pieces would be laid out on the ground, organized and separated into two groups, and then both participants of the covenant would walk between the pieces, while swearing an oath in the name of their god.

Blood was integral in covenant making, because covenants were deemed to be a life-fellowship....and because life was in the blood. Understand what that means: the covenant was life-long, and the participants considered themselves to have been joined together, almost as one flesh, under whatever terms that covenant demanded. Hundreds of years before Abraham was born, God told Adam that the life was in the blood, and mankind had not forgotten. In the countless murders that had occurred by now, and with the slaughtering and eating of animals a normal practice, it was self-evident that blood was central to life. Since blood was involved, it was understood that a covenant was a very serious matter, never to be entered into lightly. The usual penalty for breaking a covenant was death.

Salt, together with bread, was usually eaten as the final event of the covenant ceremony. The participants eating a meal together upon completion of the covenant was a way of signifying that a new family-type relationship had been formed. Salt became so important to the transaction, that the making of a covenant was sometimes called the Covenant of Salt. In fact, in some cultures the act of simply exchanging salt was at times enough to conclude a covenant over an everyday matter, without blood or all the other ritual. We find this idea of the Covenant of Salt mentioned in both the OT and the NT.

Since salt was the final step of the covenant making process..... it kind of sealed-the-deal, so to speak..... salt was considered as symbolic of peace. When the salt was partaken of, the covenanting process was completed.....similar to our, today, applying our signatures to a legal document and then shaking hands.

After the arrival of Moses, his receiving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, and the institution of the sacrificial system, God instructed the Levite priests to always **add salt** to the sacrifices. I mentioned earlier that when God made a covenant, it was forever. And, the Israelites well understood the awesome, heaven and earth-changing device that a covenant from God was. Since covenants were to be sealed with salt, the God-ordained practice of sprinkling salt on the sacrifices was to remind Israel that the covenants between God and Israel were everlasting,

AND, that the covenants had made peace between God and Israel.

Now, as we move along in our study of the Torah, we will come across some of the covenant ceremonies and procedures. I'll point them out to you, as typically only small elements of these ceremonies are included. But, I also want to mention that often in the NT we see references to salt. I hope you now see that those references to salt are all about crucial aspects of covenant making and sacrificial procedure, NOT cooking. For example, in Mark 9:50, Jesus says "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another". And, Christ also tells us "You are the salt of the earth". And, Paul says, "Let your speech be gracious, always seasoned with salt". Here salt is being recalled as the final element of a covenant or a sacrifice, and therefore being symbolic of peace and purity. In fact, by Jesus' time, when someone used the term "Covenant of Salt", it indicated a holy, enduring covenant. And, the "Covenant of Salt" also came to mean the specific covenant God made with Abraham. So, whenever we see the use of the word SALT in the scriptures, NT or OT, understand that in the mind of the Hebrew author something of great holiness in relation to a covenant or a sacrifice is being referred to.

So, now, armed with this understanding of covenants, let's go back to the terms of the covenant that God made with Abraham, understanding that this was not a **CONDITIONAL** covenant, it was a **PERMANENT** covenant. And, by definition, a covenant is **FOREVER**.

In the first 3 verses of chapter 12 we see God telling Abraham that he would become a great nation, that Abraham would be blessed and himself be a blessing, that Abraham's name would be great, that Abraham would bless all the families of the earth, and perhaps the most important aspect of this covenant in our day and time, that God will bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse Abraham..... these promises are neither idle nor obsolete; these promises, given in the form of a covenant, became a law of the spiritual and physical universe.....an unchangeable fact of life... the instant God pronounced it. To ignore this is the utmost folly. To fight against it leads to destruction because the entire operation of the Universe has been finely tuned to achieve the terms of this permanent covenant.

Israel.....and today that is primarily the Jews.....are the descendants of that unbreakable covenant handed down through Isaac, then on to Jacob (who had his name changed by God to Israel), then to his sons, the 12 tribes of Israel. Although there were **OTHER** sons of Abraham, who were many, the Bible only addresses one in particular other than Isaac, and that one is Ishmael. An important division took place that we will investigate in the coming weeks; the covenant line of promise.....that is, which of Abraham's sons would inherit all the promises contained within the covenant God made with Abraham....specifically and explicitly went to Isaac. From Isaac it went to Jacob, called Israel. So, everything that was originally given to Abraham was handed down to Israel. We can and should be fair-minded in the matters we see happening in the Middle East, particularly as concerns Israel and the proposed Palestinian State. But, the bottom line is, our support **MUST** be of Israel. Today, that covenant says ".....I will bless those who bless Israel, and curse those who curse Israel.....". That is just biblical fact, not politics. Those who stand with Israel will be blessed and favored by God, those who oppose Israel will be regarded lightly by God and will be judged for their disobedience.

Do you stand with Israel? Do you pray for Israel? Do you understand that the land belongs to Israel.....not to the Palestinians nor anyone else? Do you support Israel TANGIBLY? Or, do you want to be “even-handed”? Take a little of what God promised to Israel, and give it to the Palestinians for the sake of world peace; for the sake of your view of what is fair. A view that is opposite of God’s clearly stated mandate.

Supporting Israel does not mean to agree with everything they do; they’re just people and currently and many, if not most, are pagan. So, they’re not walking with God, which leads to terrible decisions. Supporting Israel does not mean worshipping the State of Israel; it does not mean worshipping the Jewish people.....nor declaring them above reproach. Rather, it means to come alongside of them, help them, love them and show respect, encourage them to do right, encourage them to return to Yahweh, and to remind them that those promises of God entitle them to that land and to retain their title as “God’s chosen people”.