

God Made a Covenant with Abraham

Think about all of the choices that we have each day. Just in the morning, we have dozens of different cereals to eat, perhaps that many varieties of milk to pour on top of the cereal, and nearly as many ways to make coffee to go with it. All of these are choices that we often take for granted.

Now think about all of the choices God had as He took a significant step in redemptive history and chose a couple to start a new people from whom the promised Rescuer would come. (Gen. 3:15) We see some of those choices at the tail end of Genesis 11, but we need to remember that God is not confined to choices like we are. He is all-powerful and sovereign; God had an infinite number of choices for this critical couple.

So whom did God choose? A man named Abram and his barren wife Sarai. Now that's a curious choice, isn't it? This is the couple whom God would give descendants as numerous as the stars? (Gen. 15:5) From the world's perspective, this was a curious choice at best—and a laughable choice at worst.

But from God's perspective, Abram and Sarai were a brilliant choice. First, God made it clear from the inception of this new people that He was the One bringing everything to pass. This family was special because God clearly worked in them to bring forth children. This is what Sarai understood when she said, "Who would have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne a son for him in his old age" (Gen. 21:7). That the son of promise, Isaac, married a wife, Rebekah—who was also barren—is not a coincidence. (Gen. 25:21) Nor is it a coincidence that Jesus would be born to a virgin. (Luke 1:34) God is the God who makes possible that which is impossible, including rescuing people from sin.

Second, it took a while, but in the end, Abram's faith in God came to fruition because of his wife's barrenness. This was his barrier to faith in God. This is what he struggled with for so many years. But in the end, Abram's greatest struggle became the greatest kindling of his faith. God didn't just begin a people through barrenness; He began a *faithful* people through it.

God's covenant with Abram was certainly amazing. But perhaps His choice of Abram in the first place is even more amazing.

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Melchizedek Blessed Abraham

We marvel at stories with two characters who are total opposites of each other. This is why so many stories feature some form of a noble hero and an immoral villain. The contrast of character and conduct is what drives the tension of the story.

In Genesis 14, we find two completely opposite kings: the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. One sought to get; the other sought to give. One sought to curse; the other sought to bless. One sought to take life; the other sought to give life.

These two rulers illustrate the spirit of the world and the Spirit of God, two forces actively at work in our world and in our lives.

This is why Paul reminded us in Ephesians 6 to put on the full armor of God. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand” (Eph. 6:12-13).

We live in the middle of a real fight between two opposing forces seeking to own our hearts. One, the evil spirit in our present world, like the king of Sodom seeks to take from us and generate chaos and confusion. The other, the Spirit of the living God, like the King of Salem seeks to give life and bring peace and joy.

In our present world, we must recognize that this battle goes on inside of every believer. And we must put on the full armor of God daily that we might withstand the attack of the evil one and faithfully commit to full submission to the Spirit of God. It’s not enough that we deny the evil one; we must say “yes” to God.

This battle is real and raging. And the people of God must fight with great resolve to ensure our allegiance remains to the only good King, the Lord.

God Provided Isaac

It's been said that when a word or phrase is repeated in the Bible, we ought to pay close attention. In Genesis 22, Abraham repeated one phrase three times: "Here I am."

Abraham first used "Here I am" on his journey when God called his name. Abraham's eager response to God shows that he was ready and expectant to hear from God.

Abraham then used this phrase in response to his son, Isaac. On the journey to the place of sacrifice, Isaac called out to his father and Abraham responded, "Here I am." Even though Abraham was surely wrestling with what God had commanded him to do, he was eager to hear from his son and help him understand what God was doing.

Third, Abraham responded to the angel of the Lord: "Here I am." The angel called Abraham's name twice as he was about to sacrifice his son in obedience to God. Even in a tense and emotional moment, Abraham was sensitive to the Lord and eager to hear from him.

Abraham's use of this phrase clearly shows his open-handed readiness to serve. Abraham responded to the Lord, to his son, and to the angel from his humble heart and willing spirit. Instead of shutting down and stopping his ears to God because of the incredibly challenging task God had put before him, Abraham remained steadfast in His openness to the Lord.

God desires that we always be ready for however He may intend to use us for His glory and our good. It may be as we drive along in the car, as we hurry through a long list of tasks at work, or in the stillness of a quiet moment with the Lord early in the morning. It also may come in the intensity of grieving the loss of a loved one, navigating conflict in the body of Christ, or as we gather with others to worship. Whenever we sense the leading of the Spirit of God, may we take a posture similar to Abraham, always willingly to say, "Here I am."

God Changed Jacob

Jacob's journey in Genesis is one of unexpected and undeserved blessing after blessing. With a name that literally means *he cheats*, Jacob was unlikely to receive the privilege and opportunity God gave him.

Jacob was a cheater, a liar, and a deceiver. He was quiet and not strongly gifted. And he was gullible, too. We cannot miss that the deceiver was deceived at times too—easily convinced by his mother and tricked by his uncle. But God would work through Jacob when no circumstances or characteristics made it seem possible.

In Genesis 32:10, Jacob expressed his own bewilderment to the Lord. “I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. Indeed, I crossed over the Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two camps.”

Jacob came to realize that nothing that he had accomplished or accumulated was the result of his own doing. He was not capable or competent enough to produce the many good things he had received and especially not to be the recipient of the promise of God to make his family like the dust of the earth. Jacob was humbled by the reality that through him and his offspring, all of the families of the earth would be blessed.

Have you ever had a moment of astonishment at the magnitude of what God has given you through Christ? Have you taken the time to recognize that all that you have is from God? Does it cause you to rejoice when you think about God's grace?

It's easy to look at Jacob and say he didn't deserve what God gave him. It's hard to feel that way about ourselves. But it's just as true.

Paul wrote in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Salvation should bring about this astonishment in us as well. It should remind us that we are not worthy, and it should lead us to rejoice in the undeserving gift of God's grace.