

# God's Promise to Bless the Earth

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Genesis 12-50

Genesis 12:1-9; Romans 8:6ff; 1 Corinthians 11:25

Detailed outline from the Sermon on September 23, 2007

A definition of covenant – unlike a legally binding contract, a covenant is a familial agreement with God as a critical party; even as the initiator of the covenant.

*We have assumed that God is primarily interested in teaching us “spiritual” truths – truths about “faith” and “worship” and “prayer” and “obedience.” We have, therefore, read and interpreted Genesis as a ‘sacred’ or “theological” document – about “sacred” and “theological” matters.*

*If we have paid attention at all to the description of family matters, we have usually considered them as secondary to the “really important” truths that God has preserved for our benefit. We have made a sharp distinction between what we identify as “spiritual” and what we identify as “familial.” But this distinction is arbitrary! It is not a distinction which the Lord Himself has made. Rather it is a mind-set which we have imposed upon His holy scripture.*

James R. Koch

## Abram's Part

- Leave your country, people and household.
- Go to Canaan and claim your new home.
- Change your name to Abraham (father of nations).
- Circumcise yourself and your sons.

## God's Part

- I will make of you and yours a great nation.
- I will bless you.
- I will make your name great.
- You will be a blessing.
- I will bless those who bless you.
- I will curse those who curse you.
- All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.
- To you and your offspring I will give the land (Canaan)

- I am your shield and your reward.
- I will make you fruitful.

#### Then we watch Abraham

- Moments of tremendous faith (Isaac's sacrifice)
- Moments of lunatic behavior (passing Sarah off as his sister...)

#### The covenant continues with Isaac (21 & 26 re-spoken)

- Abraham and Sarah wait forever for a child.
- God tests their loyalty.
- God sends a substitute.
- Isaac's household is a zoo.
- Esau's a bit dull; Jacob a bit too opportunistic.
- Jacob basically buys the birthright from Esau at a moment of vulnerability.
- Jacob tricks his father into giving him Esau's blessing – a kind of spiritual *coup de gras* on the birthright.

#### So the Covenant is confirmed with Jacob (restated in 28 & 35)

- Things only get zooier.
- Leah is the unwanted, surprise wife (she births Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun).
- Bilhah the handmaid and her sons (Dan and Naphtali).
- Zilpah the handmaid and her sons (Gad and Asher).
- Rachel, the favored wife and her sons in old age (Joseph and Benjamin).

#### The trouble with Joseph

- The brother's envy
- Sold into slavery
- Rises
- Betrayed
- Rises
- Ruler
- Irrepressible faith
- Savvy – best of Jacob
- Reunion with his brothers
- Judah's interesting role (38,44)

\*Now we have twelve brothers for twelve tribes.

Some things to note.

1. These are not perfect people. Abraham's treatment of Sarah is repeated by Isaac. Jacob is a conniver. Jacob's sons are downright cruel to Joseph. How Joseph turns out so well is pure providence.

*Of all the degenerative patterns that emerge from this text, perhaps the most significant of all was the disintegration of their marital (male-female) relations. For it was the dysfunction between husbands and wives that laid the primary groundwork for all other pathological reactions and patterns – including their relationships with their children.*

*From domination (Abraham's repeated exploitation of Sarah)...  
to competition (Isaac's and Rebekah's bitter rivalry)...  
to fragmentation (Jacob's detachment from 3 wives and 10 children)...  
to relational anarchy (Joseph's siblings who demonstrated little moral regard or sensitivity for healthy relationships).*

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But God keeps His part of the covenant alive. He's going to invest in this clan (tribe, nation) and infuse the whole earth with clarity and purpose because of His growing influence in and through the clan of Abraham.

For our own zoey families – God still wants to prove himself, stay with us and redeem our fickle faith, outright rebellions, tragedies and triumphs to bless the world through our families. And He wants to do the same thing through the family we call church, the new Israel.

2. Where is God in these weird stories? He's participating in a left-handed way. What do I mean? No law yet; no wisdom teachings; no prophets or gospels or epistles...no framework...so much immaturity in the people.

It's so critical that we see the Bible and the story of people generation to generation in developmental terms.

Same God, different parenting techniques - Sometimes distant; sometimes intervening; sometimes just trying to ride herd on human messiness without overdoing it or underplaying the parental hand.

Of course God is sovereign! But he needs to build a framework. So in future weeks, we'll watch him establish the laws; inspire festivals and religious practices; reinforce values; put judges and kings in place; and send prophets to speak with more clarity. Finally, Jesus...

3. Some interesting spin-offs – if you're a student of the middle east, it's an interesting study to look at what the wayward sons and wandering cousins gradually become.
4. The covenant lives on. God has a relationship to this day with Israel that is so hard for Christians to interpret with anything but humility. We still use covenants to bind our families, especially in marriage. It's a three-way covenant between God, man and woman. This covenant is not to be treated lightly. God uses marriage to illustrate his relationship to us.
5. The new Covenant in Christ's Blood.

The most tilted and slanted covenant yet. We don't even have to draw blood. He's willing to do it. He's going to forgive us; all of us who'll accept it, and all of our sin. And he's going to keep coming, keep showing up; loyal forever; with us always even to the end of the age.

And we're simply asked to believe it and accept it. Other behaviors might flow out of our gratitude, the help of the Holy Spirit and our kinship with Christ. But that's the key. We're kin to Christ.

Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we can be called children of God. (1 John 3:1)