

BIB103 OT1: Creation and Covenants

Unit 2b Patriarchs to Joseph

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Now, God's chosen people, the Israelites have a fascinating history. And it's important that we understand some of God's promises or God's direction to the Israelites. Now, remember, a little earlier, we talked about that there was four main characters that took place during the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. And that would be Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Now, with Abraham in particular, it's important that we talk about what we understand to be the Abrahamic covenant. But what is a covenant? Again, we want to make sure we understand words. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. There's two basic types of covenants. There's a conditional covenant and there is an unconditional one.

A conditional, or they sometimes call it a bilateral covenant, is an agreement that's binding on both parties for its fulfillment. And that could be a situation where, again, in the old days, they would have weddings where the father of the bride would have a dowry that he'd give to the family or the husband of the bride-to-be. And it was an agreement that was by both of them, a covenant to both commit different resources in order for this marriage to be legal in the timeframe in which they agreed upon. Now, if either party were to fail in those responsibilities, the covenant is broken and either party has to fulfill the expectations of that covenant.

An unconditional or unilateral covenant is agreement also between two parties, but only one of the two parties has to do something. Nothing is required of the other party. The Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant. God made promises to Abraham that required nothing of Abraham. Genesis 15:18-21 describes a part of the Abrahamic covenant, specifically dealing with the dimensions of the land that God promised to Abraham and his descendants. The actual Abrahamic covenant, though, is found in Genesis 12:1-3. The ceremony that's recorded in Genesis 15 indicates the unconditional nature of this covenant. The only time that both parties of a covenant would pass between the pieces of animals was when the fulfillment of the covenant was dependent upon both parties keeping those commitments.

Now, concerning the significance of God alone moving between the halves of the animals is to be noted that it's the smoking furnace and a flaming torch representing God, not Abraham, which passed between the pieces. Again, you'll see this as you unpack that section of Scripture where I'm talking about the pieces of the animal in the flame. So we're going to be giving you some direction later on to dig into that on your own a little bit further. You'll see that in this situation, it was God's solitary action that's doubtless the reason that we can explain the fact that the covenant is primarily hinged upon God fulfilling what he promises to Abraham in this case, which was representative of the nation of Israel that

Abraham would be the father of. He binds himself to the covenant and God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Abraham so that he wouldn't be able to pass between the two halves of the animals. Fulfilment of the covenant fell to God alone. Again, you'll see that in that section of Scripture there in Genesis 12.

Now, later, God gave Abraham the rite of circumcision as the specific sign, and of a physical way, of the Abrahamic covenant. You'll see that in Genesis 17:9-14. Now, all males in Abraham's line, or his children, children's children, and so on is what we mean when we say line, were to be circumcised. And then as a result, they would carry with them a lifelong mark in their flesh that they were a part of God's physical blessing in the world. Any descendant of Abraham who refused circumcision was declaring himself to be outside of God's covenant. This explains why God was angry with Moses when Moses failed to circumcise his own son. You'll see that in Exodus 4:24-26.

Now, God determined to call out a special people for himself. Remember we talked about the Israelites being his special, chosen people? And through that special people, he would bring blessings to all of the nations. The Abrahamic covenant is paramount to our proper understanding of the kingdom concept, and it's very foundational in the Old Testament theology. The Abrahamic covenant is described in Genesis 12:1-3. And, one, it's an unconditional covenant. There's no conditions attached to it. There's no if clauses suggesting its fulfilment is all dependent upon mankind. Now, two, you'll see it's also a literal covenant in which the promises should be understood to be literal. The land that was promised should be understood in a normal definition of that word. It's not a figure of speech. And number three, it was an everlasting covenant. The promises that God made to Israel are eternal.

Now, there's three main features that we're going to find that were part of that Abrahamic covenant. The first we already mentioned: the promise of land in Genesis 12:1. God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to a land that God himself was going to give him (Genesis 12:1). This promise is then again reiterated in Genesis 13:14-18 where it's confirmed by a shoe covenant. Its dimensions are given in Genesis 15:18-21. Now, this doesn't, again, allow us to consider any part that mankind had to make on that. He was making promises to Abraham specifically. And that land aspect of the Abrahamic covenant is expanded also further on in the Pentateuch, in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, which is also what we call the Palestinian covenant. So we have the promise of the land.

The second thing is the promise of descendants. In Genesis 12:2, we see that God promised Abraham that he would make a great nation of him. Abraham, who was 75 years old and childless (Genesis 12:4), was promised many descendants. God said, "As many as the sands in the seas, as many as the stars in

the sky.” The promise is amplified in Genesis 17:6 where God promised the nations and the kings would descend from this old patriarch. The promise, which we see is expanded in the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, would eventually lead to David being on the throne with the Messiah’s kingdom rule over the Hebrew people.

We see the third thing. So the promise of land, the promise of descendants, and then the promise of blessing and redemption. Remember how we said the story of redemption even begins way back here in the Book of Genesis? In Genesis 12:3, we see it here. God promised to bless Abraham and the families of all earth through him. And that promise is amplified in what we call the new covenant which is in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:6-13. And this has to do with Israel’s spiritual blessing and their redemption. Now, Jeremiah 31:34 anticipates the forgiveness of sin. The unconditional and eternal nature of the covenant is seen in that the covenant is reaffirmed by Isaac, who we’ll talk about in a couple of minutes. And you’ll see that in Genesis 21:12 as well as Genesis 26:3-4.

The “I will” promises again suggest the unconditional aspect of the covenant. The covenant is later confirmed to Jacob, Genesis 28:14-15. It’s noteworthy that God reaffirmed these promises and the sins of the patriarchs, which fact further emphasized the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant. So the blessings of redemption was one promise. We see the blessings of descendants and we see the blessings of land that were all underneath that Abrahamic covenant. God’s method of fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant is literal. And as much as God partially fulfilled the covenant in history, God blessed Abraham by giving him the land. We see that in Genesis 13:14 and 17. And centuries later, the sons of Abraham took control of that land. So the Lord gave Israel all of the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there (Joshua 21:43).

God blessed Abraham spiritually as well. We see that in Genesis 13:8, verse 18, and 14:22-23, as well as 21:22. God gave him numerous descendants (Genesis 22:17 and 49:3-28). An important element of the Abrahamic covenant, however, it demands a still future fulfilment with the Messiah’s kingdom rule that we won’t really talk a lot about in the Pentateuch, but we will certainly give direction towards as we see that tied into the redemptive story. So Israel as a nation will possess the totality of the land in the future. They didn’t have all of it at this point. Numerous Old Testament passages anticipate the future blessings of Israel and her possession of the land as promised to Abraham. In fact, Ezekiel envisions a future day when Israel is restored to the land in Ezekiel 20:33-37, 40-42, and 36:1-27.

Israel as a nation, we also see, was converted, forgiven, and restored way future tense into Romans 11:25 and 27. And then we also see that Israel will repent and receive forgiveness of sin in the future, and that is laid out in Zechariah 12:10-14. See, the Abrahamic covenant finds that its ultimate fulfillment is in connection with the return of the Messiah to rescue and bless his people, Israel. It's through the nation of Israel that God promises in Genesis 12:1-3 to bless all nations of the world. The ultimate blessing will issue in the forgiveness of sins and the Messiah's glorious return to reign on the earth.

Now, that gives you the Abrahamic covenant and the promises which are foundational to the rest of the stories that we see in the personal aspects of it because Abraham left a land that he was familiar with. We talked about that. And he came to the Promised Land. He came to be able to find out what God's promise was. He had to listen to God share things that to him seemed ridiculous, that he at 75 years of age was going to be still in future have a child with his wife Sarah, who also was as aged as he was. But God fulfilled every single one of his promises, and to this day, continues to fulfill every single one of this promises.

I love that as you see the patriarchs, one thing I want to talk about along the way is that God uses sinful men to accomplish his amazing story. Abraham was led by God to a new land. And he had a wife. That Sarah must have been quite beautiful because as he crossed through boundaries of lands, on two different occasions, Abraham's wife was noticed by the king of the land that wanted Sarah to be their wife. And Abraham lied in both of those situations and said, "She's not my wife. She's my sister." In both situations, God judged the king that took the wife in because Abraham had lied. And then Abraham is chided by nonbelievers in Jehovah God and criticized for not having faith in his own God and believing his promises. So we see the failures and the faults of Abraham that he had along the way and the sins that he committed, but we also see that God's story continues through Abraham.

And God does give Abraham a child. His name is Isaac. Isaac was precious to him. Isaac was a son that he always wanted. Isaac was the one that he cherished. But even before Isaac, we see that he didn't believe God's promises and he took one of the handmaids of Sarah that she encouraged Abraham to have a sexual relationship with, and a son was born out of that relationship. This son became the father of the nations that were against the nation, and to this day, of Israel. Those that would be birthed out of the Middle East, a lot of which even would come out of what we would consider the Muslim nations. The Jews versus the Muslims has been a historic battle even until today. A ferocity and terrible terror that takes place there where many lives have been taken from this earth, all as a result of the beginning

stages of Abraham's unwillingness to obey God's command and believe in the promise that God had there.

So Abraham had his son Isaac. And then God said something to Abraham. "Abraham, I want you to take your son. I want you to take him up to the mountainside and I want you to offer as a sacrifice." Abraham was devastated. "My son? But, God, I don't understand this. You made promises." But at this point, we see how Abraham believed and embraced the promises of God. He took his son. He took the materials needed to put on the sacrifice, to be able to burn the sacrifice, and he left. His son was not quite sure what was going to happen, but he got an idea of it. And the turning point was when, as he put his son on that altar and pulled that knife back to plunge into the chest of his only son, that God sends a sacrifice caught in the bushes that were there that he was able to sacrifice before God. God wanting to see Abraham "Do you really believe that I will fulfill my promises?" Now, we don't know what was running through Abraham's mind. Did he think that God would bring back his son and bring Isaac back from the dead? Did he know that he was going to have an animal in the bushes there? We're not sure, but we know that he obeyed. And when we choose to obey God, even if it seems crazy to us, when we choose to obey God's word and follow through with it, we will always be blessed and taken care of by God.

So Isaac did grow up and Isaac had two sons. In fact, twins: Jacob and Esau. And Jacob and Esau, they were at each other from the very beginning. Esau was a little older than Jacob. The Bible says that Jacob actually had a hold of Esau's ankle as he came out of the womb and they were at it. And Esau was a rugged hunter, rough and tumble man who enjoyed the outdoors and all that came with it. And Jacob was gentler. He enjoyed more the domestic things. He had a special relationship with his mother. And Jacob also was a deceiver. Again, remember how we talked about each of these patriarchs seemed to struggle with different aspects of their life? And Jacob was a deceiver. And in fact, Jacob's own mother encouraged his deception.

And the way that the Bible was laid out and the way that the characters were laid out in the Bible, we also see that there's birth orders that take place and certain blessings that come with them. Jacob, not being the firstborn son, wasn't going to get the birthright, which indicated a special blessing given to the oldest child in the family. Esau was supposed to get that. So Jacob, he not only deceived his father, but he deceived his brother. He deceived his brother who came back from hunting with a bowl of stew and made him or conned him into giving his birthright to Jacob. And then Jacob went into his father and put fur from animals on him, so that when his father was practically dying felt, it seemed that he was like Esau and he gave the birthright, that special favor and blessing that he gave to Jacob

that couldn't, by the way, be turned back again. Jacob was a deceiver. And a result of that, Jacob frequently lived as an outcast. But he was still the patriarch that God chose to continue the line of Abraham and to continue the line of the Jewish nation. Esau became the father of the Edomites who were mountain dwellers. And there was a rift between the two brothers for years and years that came back together to some degree later on, but a lot of heartache that was there as things traversed on the course of humanity.

Now, Jacob, he was an individual who left home base and went off, and Jacob wanted to get married. And Jacob had a woman named Rachel that he loved dearly and wanted to marry, and had made an arrangement with her father. And the father said, "Work seven years and I'll give you my daughter Rachel." And he fooled him. Now, I'm not sure how he fooled him, but Jacob found out pretty quickly that he had been given Leah, and that was Rachel's older sister. The excuse given by the father was "Well, we give the first daughter first, and you can keep working another seven years, though, and you can have Rachel." You see the commitment of love that Jacob must have had for Rachel because he worked the next seven years. But we still see a betrayal there. We still see a deception there in the life as even Rachel partnered on and they stole some very important articles from her father as they left and established their own tribe and their own family. And God blessed them through Rachel and Leah. They had 12 different sons. And we'll be giving you some work to kind of investigate each of those sons and the history that they have. But for now, we're going to focus on the one that carried the line, which was Joseph.

Now, Joseph was a special child. And Joseph wasn't necessarily looked upon favorably by his brothers. Why was that? Joseph was given special dreams by God and special favor, by the way, by Jacob. Do you see the generational challenges that take place there? Isaac had a special place in his heart for Esau, and Jacob had a special place in his mother's heart. You'll see how that preferential...which is just again a reminder to us about being careful about being biblical and not grabbing on to some of the baggage of our family upbringing, and making sure we're treating our children fairly and we're following through on the promises that we have. And Joseph was treated special and his brothers became jealous of that. That's a natural thing as one is lifted up above another one.

Joseph didn't do it, though, with any kind of heart of deceit. It was different than his father and his grandfather and his great grandfather even. We see that Joseph wanted to share these dreams because he knew that God had a plan in it. But the dreams indicated that his parents and his brothers would bow to him, that he would somehow be elevated, which flew in the face of everything that they believed in.

And “How dare you.” Joseph, wasn’t even the oldest son. The anger grew to such a degree that on one occasion, when Joseph was sent to go check on his brothers who were out in the countryside with the flocks, that his brothers plotted against him.

Now, Joseph, because he was a special child of his father’s, he was given a special coat, a coat of many colors, we called it. It was one that definitely stuck out in this. They saw their brother coming. The brothers out in the countryside saw Joseph coming. They had the plot put together. Now, what was that plot going to be? It sounds like they were probably going to even take his very life, but God intervened. They took their brother, and he was bewildered by this. “How can you do this evil to him?” as they took him and ripped the coat off of him. They even took the coat and ripped it up and stuck it in an animal’s blood so that they could tell his father later on that he’d been attacked by a wild animal. They threw him in a pit. And then a traveling band came by, which oftentimes happen now. Not band the way we think of with music, but a band of travelers that would trade and go from city to city or from different village to village, or they would caravan along and they would do trading with the different people that they came across. And when Joseph’s brother saw this traveling caravan or band come through, they decided, “I know what we’ll do.” And they took their brother Joseph, their own brother, and they sold their brother to this traveling group. And they sold him for what would be the price of a servant.

And we’re going to see correlations later on of Joseph as it relates to Christ again. And we see pictures throughout the Old Testament, in the Pentateuch in particular, of where Christ is envisioned in the Old Testament. Though in this case, Joseph being the one that was sold for [20]¹ pieces. Later we’ll see in the New Testament that Jesus was sold for 30 pieces. But God had a specific plan for Joseph because Joseph was doing everything, again, he did through genuine care and concern. And Joseph did something that’s very powerful. He chose to not sin against God. He chose that even during his darkest hours, he questioned God but he didn’t sin against God.

And Joseph was taken by this caravan. He was sold to a man named Potiphar. Now, Potiphar was the general in charge of the nation of Egypt. He was in a powerful position of influence there, and he was a very wealthy man. And he took Joseph and he put him in his family’s servants’ quarters. And he rose in the ranks where he was over the whole household, everything except for Potiphar’s wife. But Potiphar’s wife liked Joseph. In fact, she had a lustful desire for him and she pursued him, and Joseph said, “No. I can’t do that. It’s wrong.” And even in her fit of rage of wanting Joseph and his denial and rejection of her, she grabs his coat as he runs away, knowing to do the right thing, and she keeps it and uses it as a tool against him to go to her husband and say, “Joseph tried to rape me. Joseph tried to take advantage

of me.” Potiphar was furious, as well he should have been, even though his wife completely lied. And Joseph was then taken and wrenched from that household that God had blessed because of Joseph’s care of it. Potiphar knew that. That’s why he raised him in the ranks. And now Joseph was cast into prison.

So Joseph is thrown into prison, starts at the bottom again. He’s in the dark depths of despair, or could be, but God still reaches out. And we see how the Bible even says again that God shows favor to Joseph. And he also uses the same thing that he used in Joseph’s younger life, and then he was able to help interpret dreams now. And two of the king’s primary servants, the baker and the butler, come to him and say, “We have these dreams. Nobody can answer them. We hear that you might be able to.” And Joseph gives them an interpretation. They’re so incredibly grateful for it, even though it indicates the baker will end up facing execution and the butler will be elevated in his position. And Joseph has but one request. “Please remember me. Please tell the king about me, so I can get out of this prison.” Well, both leave and he is forgotten.

He continues to rise in authority and in ability to be able to leave the prison. The man in charge of all the prisons sees the amazing ability that’s given to Joseph, how God’s hand is on him and he elevates him. And finally, when the king couldn’t figure out a dream, when the king was plagued, and all of these magicians and all of the soothsayers couldn’t do it, finally the butler remembers Joseph, and Joseph is called to the throne room of the king. And Joseph, through the power of God, interprets the king’s dreams and indicates to him that what his dreams mean is there’s going to be seven years where the land of Egypt is going to experience wealth and abundance of grains and thriving in prosperity in their culture for seven years, beyond what they’ve ever possibly even dreamed of. But that will be followed by seven years of incredible leanness and famine and destruction. And Pharaoh decides to use a man who had just been in prison when he sees the way the hand of God is on him and elevates him to be the man in charge of gathering all the resources in the first seven years so that they will be okay in the second seven years.

What an amazing time Joseph has. He’s finally reached a pinnacle. He’s lauded for what he does. He organizes a nationwide collection. He takes care of it where even other nations during their famine come. Part of that nation being his own brothers are sent by his father to come in to get grain and supplies from the land of Egypt. Joseph, now looking more like an Egyptian than he ever did, like his own people, the Jews, isn’t recognized by his brothers, on top of the fact that I’m sure the years have taken a toll on him. He is able to disguise himself, but he knows his brothers. And he plays some tricks on them,

we see, where he ends up taking Benjamin, who is now the privileged child, the youngest child of his father, and takes him in as ransom, to hold him as kidnap for ransom, to make sure that his brothers will come back, accusing them of theft by planting some gold cups, this gold cup into their bag of grain, so that they would have to come back again and his father would have to be reunited with him. He finally unveils to his brothers that he is Joseph. They're scared that they're done, their lives are over. They know what they did to Joseph. But instead, Joseph is so grateful and he's restored with his people. And again, he only asked that "When I die, would you take my bones from the land of Egypt?" knowing that God would fulfill his promise that we talked about the Abrahamic covenant and give them the lands that were due to them. It's a powerful story of God's, again, redemption, of God using mankind, of God using us even in our struggles to be able to fulfill his great purposes.

1. Edited by BLB [An error was made in the original incorrectly stating 30 pieces. (Gen 37:28)]