

## Dispensation of Promise, Part One

01/24/2016

Hymns: 19 The Light of the World Is Jesus 64 There Is Power in the Blood  
Scripture: Psalm 105:1-12, 42-45

Well, it looks like we survived another cold winter blast. Despite our good fortune, Washington D.C. has been **buried** under over two feet of snow. But that hasn't cooled things down on the political side of town as the presidential primaries are just heating up.

It's just eight days until the Iowa caucus. The New Hampshire and South Carolina primaries follow close behind. We will have to endure over nine months of half truths and outright lies as we prepare to elect our next commander-in-chief, the entire House of Representatives, and one third of our senators.

One big part of presidential politics involves slogans. You may recall our current president pledged *hope and change* while at the same time he swore to defend the Constitution. I'll let you decide how that worked out.

Here's a very famous slogan. Can anyone identify which president used it?

*A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage* - Herbert Hoover  
Here's a hint: 1928 Presidential Campaign Slogans  
Does anyone here want to admit remembering *living* during that time?

That campaign promise in particular didn't work out very well as shortly after, the U.S. stock market crashed and ushered in the Great Depression. I'm sure many of you remember the Depression.

These were campaign promises. Today, we're going to look at some of God's promises.

### Review

Before we do, let's have a brief review to set the context of this study. We're continuing our task of understanding the Bible by looking at *dispensations*. So far, we've covered three:

1. Innocence – Adam – ending in the fall and the curse
2. Conscience – Noah – flood
3. Human Government – Nimrod – scrambled languages

Based on our topic for the day, you might well guess that number four is the *Dispensation of Promise*. That's correct. Its central figure, named Abram, later had his name changed to Abraham. The scripture for this dispensation starts right off with many **promises** from God:

### Gen.12

[1] Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and **from thy kindred**, and from thy father's house, unto

a land that I will sh[ow] thee:

[2] **And** I will make of thee a great nation,

**and** I will bless thee,

**and** make thy name great;

*and thou shalt be a blessing:  
[3] And I will bless them that bless thee,  
and curse him that curseth thee:  
and in thee  
shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

Now there's a lot of promises.

Abram responded by doing *almost* as the Lord instructed. He picked up stakes and went to the land of Canaan, but he disobeyed by taking his nephew, Lot, with him.

*[7] And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said,  
Unto thy seed [descendants] will I give this land:*

You may recall from last time that Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Abram descended from Shem. Canaan was the son of Ham. Israel was originally Canaan's land, but God gave it to Abram, the descendant of Shem.

In the next chapter, the Lord shows Abram the Promised Land and adds another promise.

## Gen.13

*[14] And the LORD said unto Abram, ...  
Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art  
northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:  
[15] For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed **for ever**.*

*[16] And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth:  
so that if a man can number the dust of the earth,  
then shall thy seed also be numbered.*

*[17] Arise, walk through the land  
in the length of it  
and in the breadth of it;  
for I will give it unto thee.*

There are many theological words thrown around that never appear in the Bible. Now we're going to look at a very important word used by Bible scholars that **does** appear in the Bible.

## Covenant

It's a particular type of **promise** called a *covenant*. Specifically, it's the covenant that God made with Abram, then with Abraham, and confirmed with Isaac, and Jacob.

The word *covenant* means a binding, usually written, agreement or **promise**. We learned the first usage in the Bible of the word *covenant* appears in **the** Genesis story of Noah. From that story we saw last time the following **five key elements** associated with God's covenant after the flood:

1. The *parties* in covenant.
2. The *promise* or *terms* of the covenant.
3. The *duration* of the covenant.
4. The *type* unilateral vs. bilateral.
5. The *token or sign* of the covenant. Can anyone remember that token?

We'll now pick up our story of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis chapter 15.

Genesis 15

[1] ... the word of the LORD came unto Abram **in a vision**, saying,

**Fear not**, Abram:

I love to read that. Just as Abram **need not fear**. Neither do we. Why?  
Because the Lord is with us.

*I am thy shield,  
and thy exceeding great reward.*

Then Abram asked the Lord whether his heir would be his steward Eliezer of Damascus since Abram was 75 years old and the Lord had given him no children.

[4] ... This **shall not** be thine heir; but **he that shall come forth out of thine own[body] shall be thine heir**.

[5] ..., **Look now toward heaven, and [count] the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.**

Even with all of our technology, we **still** cannot number the stars.

[6] *And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

That should sound familiar. Romans 4:13-15 cites this example to assure us the basis of our relationship with our Lord is faith plus nothing.

[7] *And he [the LORD] said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.*

[8] *And he [that is Abram] said, Lord GOD, **whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?***

The Lord responded by giving him an assignment.

[9] *And he said unto him,  
Take me **an heifer** of three years old,  
and **a she goat** of three years old,  
and **a ram** of three years old,  
and **a turtledove**,  
and **a young pigeon**.*

That's five animals.

[10] *And he **took unto him** all these,  
and **divided them** in the midst,  
and **laid each piece** one against another:  
but the birds divided he not.*

[11] *And when the fowls came down upon **the carcasses**, **Abram drove them away**.*

These animals were slaughtered. This obviously involved a lot of **blood** which naturally would attract scavenger birds and birds of prey.

[12] *And **when** the sun was going down,  
a **deep sleep** fell upon Abram;  
and, lo, [a thick and dreadful] **darkness** fell upon him.*

[17] *And it came to pass, that, **when** the sun went down,  
and it was dark,  
**behold** a smoking furnace,  
and a burning lamp  
[] passed between those pieces.  
[18] *In the same day the LORD made a **covenant** with Abram,**

Okay, it would have been nice if this were a little clearer. What is going on here?

In the culture of Abram's day we're told that when people made solemn covenants, they participated in this rather elaborate scene. You've heard the expression "Over my dead body." That means that you are **so committed** to your position, that you would **die** to defend it. The same kind of thinking relates to this custom.

The participants in the covenant walked between halves of dead animals to indicate that **if** they break their covenant, they should also be killed and cut in half. While this sounds a bit extreme, perhaps something like this in our day might help hammer home that covenants are not to be taken lightly or entered into with the intent of exiting them on a whim.

**So** we know what's intended with the carcasses split in half.  
We know from verse 18 that the covenant **was** between the Lord and Abram.

And in verse 12 we're told that Abram was in deep sleep. The only one left to walk through was the Lord.

Does the Lord fit the description of “a smoking furnace” and “a burning lamp”? In three places in the Bible, the Lord is described as a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3; Hebrews 12:29) and His word is a light and lamp (Psalm 119:105). Based on that, we can answer the question, “Yes.” Those are fitting symbols for the Lord.

The key things to note here are:

1. This covenant involved *blood*.
2. The *type* of this covenant was *unilateral*. Only the Lord walked through.

Now let's move on to Genesis 17.

Notice this passage contains **thirteen** references to the word *covenant* and **ten** instances of the word *circumcise*. It has much to say about those two terms. We won't hit all of the verses, but as we go through, we will specifically note **new things** related to this covenant.

[1] *And when Abram was **ninety [nine years] old**, the LORD appeared to [him], and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.*

[2] *And I will make **my covenant** between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.*

[3] *And Abram fell on his face:*

*and God talked with him, saying,*

[4] *As for me, **behold, my covenant** is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.*

That's new. Before he was promised a great nation but now **many** nations from him.

[5] *Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of **many** nations have I made thee.*

That's something else new – a **new name** which means *father of a multitude*.

[6] *And I will make thee exceeding[ly] fruitful, and I will make **nations** [from] thee, and **kings** shall come [from] thee.*

That's new. He's the root of a **royal** line.

[7] *And I will establish **my covenant** between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*

Here we see the *parties* of the covenant: God ↔ Abraham, descendants  
as well as the duration or *term* of the covenant: Everlasting  
Next we'll pick up a piece of the *promise*: The Promised Land

*[8] And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, **the land** wherein thou art a stranger, all **the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession;***

This is the most secure deed possible. Does it ever expire? No!

*and I will be their God.*

So we've covered the parties of the covenant (God, Abraham and his descendants) the **type** of this covenant (unilateral – depending only on God's faithfulness), the **duration** of this covenant (eternal), and **the** many promises in it. Now we'll pick up that *symbol* or *token*.

*[9] And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep **my covenant** therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.*

*[10] ... Every man child among you shall be **circumcised**.*

*[11] And ye shall **circumcise** the flesh of your foreskin; and it **shall be a token** of the **covenant** betw[een] me and you.*

*[12] And he that is **eight days old** shall be **circumcised** among you, every man child in your generations, ...*

*[13] He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must [] be **circumcised**: and **my covenant** shall be in your flesh for **an everlasting covenant**.*

To summarize and make application, circumcision involved:

1. Cutting away flesh – We're exhorted to cast off the works of the flesh.
2. A member of the body directly associated with producing offspring – We're charged with sharing the gospel.
3. A permanent change – Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.
4. A constant reminder – We **who** know the Lord have God's abiding presence within us through His Holy Spirit.
5. Cutting a ring or circle – Just as a circle has no end, God's covenant gives eternal life.
6. Blood – Our salvation was purchased by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Then the Lord told Abraham that a year from that day, his wife, Sarah, would deliver a son named Isaac. When the Lord left, Abraham circumcised himself, his son Ishmael, and all the other men in his house that same day. (vv. 21-24)

In Genesis 26:3-4, the Lord confirmed this covenant with Isaac mentioning specifically the land, the innumerable descendants forming a nation, and the blessing of the earth through them. God then tells him why:

*[5] Because [] Abraham **obeyed** my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.*

Finally, in Genesis 28:13-14, the Lord confirmed this **same** covenant with Jacob in a dream. You may recall the story of Jacob's ladder. When Jacob awoke, he was afraid and thought that he had found the gate to heaven. Of course, in a manner of speaking he did, because:

from **that covenant** and  
in **that land**

God provided that **great blessing** to all the world – a Savior.

### **Application**

We started out today considering the storm that just passed through and political promises that are so frequently broken. What storms of life have you been facing lately? Perhaps a spouse, a close family member, or someone you trust has broken a promise, or covenant with you. To whom do your turn?

Thankfully, God keeps His covenants to us despite **the** many disappointing things **we do** in our lives. He proved His sincerity with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. Just as there was blood involved with God's sealing His covenant with Abraham, and with the token of circumcision, Jesus Christ willingly bled and died for you and for me shedding his own blood on the cross that we might secure eternal life through His righteousness imputed to us by faith in Him.

### **Benediction**

*Now the God of peace,  
that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,  
that great shepherd of the sheep,  
through the **blood of the everlasting covenant**,  
Make you perfect in every good work to do his will,  
working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight,  
through Jesus Christ;  
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)*