

Finding Your Place in God's Story of Redemption Winter/Spring 2015

Finding your Place in God's Story: The Covenant of Grace and Everyday Life - This class will take you step by step through the covenants of the Bible and help you understand the over-arching plot of scripture through the lens of God's Covenant of Grace. We will explore the aspect of God's covenant through its various administrations throughout the Old and New testaments and answer the question:

What does each sub-plot mean for our lives today?

What role do we play in God's story of redemption?

How does a promise made so many centuries ago to Noah, Abraham and David have an impact on my life?

The objective of this class is: to equip you with the confidence to read and understand scripture and find your place in the continuing story of God's redemptive grace.

- 1) *The story of redemption thus far....* The story of redemption up to this point might be characterized as progressing from Creation (God's declaration of his right to be King), to the Covenant of Works – the covenant made between God and Adam and subsequently with all over whom Adam was appointed as *federal* head. Adam violated the Covenant of Works through his disobedience and the Covenant of Grace (the overarching plot of the story) commenced in Genesis 3:15. Then, a period transpired from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden through the "*corruption of all flesh upon the earth*" (Genesis 6:11) leading God to destroy the earth with a great flood. By His grace (Genesis 6:8), God chose Noah as the covenant representative through whom he would bring immediate salvation (deliverance from the flood), and establish His universal Covenant of Preservation. In the Covenant with Noah, the extent of redemption is realized as being inclusive of all of creation, though not inclusive of every human being. After the flood, there was a push to re-populate the earth culminating in the efforts at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11). According to Michael Williams, it is here that man, "...sought to build God out of the world through their nation building". The men of Babel were looking for human greatness apart from God, a solidarity built on the might and power of man. They sought to, "...*build a name for themselves*" (Genesis 11:4). God's response was to confuse their languages (Genesis 11:7). Their mission (to prevent from being dispersed across the face of the earth), was thwarted since the confounding of their languages resulted in the very thing they hoped to prevent. The fragmentation of humanity seemed to counteract the mission of God's redemptive plan to restore. Surely this dispersion would make complete restoration more difficult. God's solution was to choose a man. His redemptive drama is narrowed in scope from the entire world to the descendants of Noah through the line of Shem and to a man named Abraham.
- 2) *The Call of Abraham:* Little is known of Abraham other than his lineage. We are not certain how much he knew about the God of Creation, and we should not assume that our understanding of God's unfolding plan of redemption fully disclosed in the completed canon of scripture was understood by Abraham. We do know that he, through faith, saw the day of Christ (John 8:56). What he saw was enough to make him rejoice. Beyond this, we can only speculate. God's call to Abraham consisted of elements which would later compile the Covenant with Abraham, though the term covenant or "brit" does not appear until Genesis 15:18. These elements are as follows:

Finding Your Place in God's Story of Redemption Winter/Spring 2015

- 1) Go – the imperative command required action on the part of Abraham. He was to leave the land of his nativity in search of an unknown land that God would disclose to him as he went. Thinking back on the Suzerain elements of a covenant in the ancient near east, this can be compared to the “terms of the agreement”.
- 2) I will make of you a great nation (nation indicates a people bound together ethnically, religiously, politically and geographically).
- 3) I will bless you and make your name great (God doing for Abraham what the men of Babel sought to do for themselves – Genesis 11:4).
- 4) So that you will be a blessing (the missional intent of God’s election).
- 5) I will bless those who bless you (covenantal blessing by association).
- 6) I will curse those who dishonor you (covenantal curse by association – literally Abraham is in “league” with God).
- 7) So that all the families of the earth will be blessed in you (again, the missional intent of God’s election).

These elements of the covenant would compel Abraham to action. He obeyed God and left the land of his nativity. The Abrahamic Covenant would be continued in Chapters 15 and 17 of Genesis with the addition of a few key elements.

- 3) *The Covenant with Abraham*: In Chapter 15, we see in greater detail the continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant. Abraham had left the land of his nativity with the promise of God’s blessing, a blessing which revolved around his descendants. However, until this point in his life, Abraham had yet to have a son and his wife Sarai had yet to conceive. He believed God’s promises, but did not see how they would be fulfilled. There was a custom in the time of Abraham that if a man with wealth had no son, he could adopt his steward and cause him to inherit his substance. When God appeared again to Abraham it was to provide assurance that he would literally fulfill the earlier promise to make the “fruit of his loins” his heir and not his steward. In this appearance we see the following elements:

- 1) I am your shield (protection), your reward shall be great (salutation reiterating the vassal-lord relationship).
- 2) Your offspring shall be as numerable as the stars.
- 3) You shall possess the land far as your eyes can see. (The selection of the particular parcel of land – *Canaan* was not the most fertile, nor was it the most secure. However, it was the most strategically placed real estate for reaching the known world. For this reason it was known as the “cross roads” of the ancient near east. Implicit in the selection of this piece of land is God’s mission for His covenant community. A mission which is at the very heart of God’s story of redemption).

From the combination of the two chapters (Genesis 12 and Genesis 15), we can summarize the Abrahamic Covenant as consisting of the following three elements.

- a) The Seed – The Abrahamic Covenant consistently looks to the seed of Abraham as the basis of universal blessing. Though seed/offspring in a very real sense if addressing Isaac and the physical descendants of Abraham, in a more redemptive way it is referencing the promised “seed” of Genesis 3:15.

Finding Your Place in God's Story of Redemption Winter/Spring 2015

We find validation of this in the New Testament. In Galatians 3:16 we read, *"Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say and to 'offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring', who is Christ."*

- b) The land: The geographic boundary of the promised land of Canaan played a critical role in the Abrahamic Covenant. It becomes the basis for the remainder of the Pentateuch as even the Mosaic Covenant is instruction for *living in the land*. However, in the context of redemptive history, God's plan exceeds the boundaries of the land of Canaan. The geographic boundaries of the land of promise sought only to delineate the physicality of the community living under the Lordship of God. His greater plan is and always has been to bring redemption, "...as far as the curse is found".
- c) The Blessing: Whereas man's fall brought a curse, God's redemptive plan brings a blessing.

As Michael Williams so beautifully states, "The name given to Abraham, the fame he is to acquire, the reputation his posterity will achieve, all constitute an intentional divine counterpoint to the influence sought by the men of Babel (Gen. 11). They sought to build God out of the world by their nation building. God, however, will build a nation that will represent him in the world."

- 4) *What does this mean for me?* As we continue on this journey of exploring the covenants of scripture it is helpful to observe exactly what relevancy the respective covenants have for us today. Think for a moment about the following questions. How does God's missional intent behind His covenant with Abraham relate to me today? Is there a missional element to the assembly of the body of Christ here at HPC? Is there a missional element to my Small Group? Is there a missional element to my vocation? Is there a missional element to how God intends for me to relate to my spouse, children, and community?