

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: Covenant history

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As we examined the first eleven chapters of Genesis last month, we took note of the fact that the book of Genesis is *theological*, meaning it helps us to grow in our knowledge of God. In addition, we noted that the book of Genesis is *historical*, meaning that the events chronicled in it are the true history of humanity. As we continue in our reading of Genesis this month, we will see that it is also *covenantal*; it shows us God's faithfulness to his people and how he established a covenant relationship with them. In the beginning, Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship with their heavenly Father. They lived in the garden as his friend-servants and cared for the creation. But this relationship was severed by Adam and Eve's disobedience against God. Since Adam was the representative head of the whole human race, by nature all people are now born in sin and separated from God (Rom. 5:12). But by God's grace, he reestablished a relationship of friendship with his elect people in Christ, the promised seed of Genesis 3:15. This relationship is called the covenant of grace.

The covenant of grace spoken to Adam and Eve was reestablished with Noah after the flood and again with Abraham, but these were not entirely new covenants. They were renewals of the one, unified covenant that God established with Adam and continues to establish with all his elect people throughout time. As we go on to read through Genesis 12–36 this month, we can trace the history of this covenant through the lives of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God worked through the lives of these men and their families to grow his people from one chosen family to a chosen nation. Hebrews 11 counts these men among the great heroes of faith. But as we read the stories of their lives, we can see that their faith, though genuine, was far from perfect. They were all sinful men who sometimes acted selfishly and made decisions out of fear instead of faith. The great weakness of these fathers of our faith serves to emphasize the great faithfulness of our heavenly Father. Throughout their history we can see the truth of Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace are ye

saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

God's steadfast faithfulness to his people during the time of the patriarchs is still a comfort to us today as well. We are all weak, sinful children of Adam, no more able to maintain the covenant than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were. But as we look back at God's faithfulness to his people in the past, we are given hope for the future because we know that God is not only faithful, but he is also immutable, or unchanging. He declares in Malachi 3:6, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Our God, who established the covenant unilaterally by his grace so long ago, is still faithful today and will continue to be faithful forever. God sovereignly shaped his chosen people and guided them to the promised land by means of the circumstances and trials of their lives. We can be confident that the trials and troubles that we face in our own lives are accomplishing the same purpose.

We are able to learn many lessons from the lives of the patriarchs. Their lives provide us with both instruction on how to live a godly life and dangers to avoid. We can see the wonder of God's grace and his faithfulness to his covenant

promises in their lives. But the beauty of studying this covenant history is that not only can we look back to see the importance of the past and what we can learn from it, we are also compelled to look forward to the future. Each of these men in their own way was a dim picture of the promised seed who was coming. This promised seed is essential to the covenant!

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior this month, take time to seek and find Jesus in the stories of his forebearers. Recognize that the people and events contained in these chapters serve as signs, directing us ahead to something even better. Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of all the promises that God made from the very beginning. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (Heb. 11:13). But from our vantage point in the twenty-first century, we can see beyond this history to trace God's covenant people from a nation to a kingdom, through exile and restoration, to the New Testament church, and can look forward by faith to the promise of a new Jerusalem. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

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Date	Read	Study
Dec 8	Genesis 11:27–12:9	How does the promise that God gives to Abram in Genesis 12:3 find its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ? (See also Gal. 3:8–16.)
Dec 9	Genesis 12:10–13:4	Where can you see man's sinfulness and God's faithfulness in this account of Abram's time in Egypt?
Dec 10	Genesis 13:5–18	What can you learn about the correct way to respond to conflict with other Christians from Abram's godly example here?
Dec 11	Genesis 14	In what way was Melchizedek a type of Christ? (See also Heb. 7.)
Dec 12	Genesis 15:1–6	What does verse 6 mean when it says that God counted it (Abram's faith) for righteousness? Where does faith come from?
Dec 13	Genesis 15:7–21	What can you learn about man's part in the covenant from the fact that Abram was sleeping when God passed between the animals?
Dec 14	Genesis 16:1–6	How did Abram and Sarai rebel against the will of God? What consequences did they face as a result?
Dec 15	Genesis 16:7–16	What attributes of God do you see displayed in the Lord's meeting with Hagar?
Dec 16	Genesis 17:1–8	Why could God call Abram (and all believers) to live a sanctified life? (See also Heb. 13:20–21.)
Dec 17	Genesis 17:9–27	How was circumcision a "token" or sign of the covenant? What has replaced circumcision as a sign of the covenant today?
Dec 18	Genesis 18	How would you answer the question of verse 14, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (See also Mark 10:26–27; Luke 1:34–38.)
Dec 19	Genesis 19	What are the dangers of allowing worldliness to have a place in your life and family as shown in the sad story of Lot's life?
Dec 20	Genesis 20	How do the events of this chapter show that God's ability to fulfill his promises cannot be dependent on man?
Dec 21	Genesis 21	In what way does the birth of Isaac foreshadow the birth of Christ? See if you can find seven similarities.
Dec 22	Genesis 22	How does God's test of Abraham's faith here underscore the truth of God's great love for you in sending his only Son as a sacrifice for your sin?

Dec 23	Genesis 23	What is the significance of the fact that Abraham purchased a burial plot for Sarah in the land of Canaan?
Dec 24	Genesis 24	How is the truth of God's sovereignty shown in the events of this chapter?
Dec 25	Genesis 25:1–11	Thinking about this passage and what you have read this month so far, how would you describe Abraham's life? How does his life point to Christ?
Dec 26	Genesis 25:12–18	How are God's promises to Hagar and Abraham in Genesis 16:10–12 and 17:20 fulfilled here? How does this show the truth of Ishmael's name—"God hears"?
Dec 27	Genesis 25:19–34	How does the struggle between Jacob and Esau that began in the womb echo that of Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac? What great conflict are these foreshadowing?
Dec 28	Genesis 26:1–33	How did Isaac echo the sins and strengths of his father Abraham? How is God's graciousness evident in the lives of both father and son?
Dec 29	Genesis 26:34–28:9	How did God use Isaac's family squabbles, which resulted from Isaac's own weakness, to accomplish his good purposes?
Dec 30	Genesis 28:10–22	What short-term and long-term promises did God give Jacob here?
Dec 31	Genesis 29–30:24	How do these events make clear that God is in control of conception no matter how much we may think we are?
Jan 1	Genesis 30:25–31:55	How did God use the afflictions of this family to lead his people to the promised land? What can you learn from this?
Jan 2	Genesis 32:1–21	What can you learn about praying according to the promises of God's word from Jacob's prayer before he meets with Esau?
Jan 3	Genesis 32:22–32	What did Jacob learn about self-sufficiency when he wrestled with the Lord? How did his changed name emphasize this?
Jan 4	Genesis 33	How did Jacob show his humility when he came to Esau? How does pride often get in the way of reconciliation?

Jan 5	Genesis 34	How did Jacob repeat Lot's mistake? What can you learn about the dangers of forming friendships with ungodly people from Jacob's children?
Jan 6	Genesis 35	How did Jacob experience both sorrow and joy at this time? Why are these two things so often experienced together in the life of a Christian?
Jan 7	Genesis 36:1-37:1	What can you learn about the difference between material and spiritual blessings from examining the life and descendants of Esau compared to his brother Jacob?