# Covenant Provisions

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0:00] that we read together in the book of Genesis, chapter 17. And there are some things in this chapter that I think we may learn about God's encounter here with Abraham.

The Christian believer believes that he is a Christian because God has made a covenant with him. Those of us who are Christians and who profess our Christian faith by coming to the Lord's Supper and sharing in the bread and the wine there, this is one of the things that we very obviously profess when we come there.
Because we hear Christ's own words, when he first gave the cup of wine to the disciples at the first Lord's table in the upper room.
And Jesus said, this is the cup, or this cup is the new covenant in my blood. And so we are remembering that we are Christians because God has entered into friendship with his people.
That's what a covenant is. It's an agreement. It's a binding agreement between people to be friends.
And God is saying through Jesus, by what I have done in my son Jesus on the cross, I have opened up a way so that I can commit myself to my people, sinners though they are, and I can be their friend, and they can be my friends forever.
[1:59] Now, of course, as we study the life of Abraham in the Bible, we remember that Abraham supremely is called the friend of God.

He's the prototype Christian in the Bible. He's the first great and clear example of what it is to be a Christian, of what it is to be the friend of God, and to know the Almighty and the All-Holy God to be the friend of his people.
And so it's therefore not surprising that we find God speaking to Abraham in terms of covenant.
And we hear of God coming to Abraham from time to time and explaining to him how he, the Almighty God, is able to enter into this binding, this everlasting covenant of friendship between God and Abraham.
And it's an example of that covenant that he makes with all his people. Those of you who were with us a few Sunday mornings ago will remember that we came across this word covenant in chapter 15 of Genesis.
[3:26] You'll remember the time when God called Abraham to prepare the animals and to split them in two and to keep the birds off them all day. And then in the evening, Abraham received this vision of a burning furnace moving between the cut and split in two animals.

And Abraham knew because of the way that covenants were made in Abraham's day. Abraham knew that this was God speaking to him of the way that he would make a covenant with Abraham that would be binding forever.
And now, a good number of years later, perhaps 15 years later, God comes to Abraham again. And in this chapter, chapter 17, he fills out some of the details for Abraham.
And he enables all who walk in the same faith as Abraham to learn more of what it means when God enters into covenant and brings us into the circle of his friends and makes us his people, Christian believers who have the hope of everlasting life.
I want us to see from this chapter one or two of the things about this covenant that God describes for us here. First of all, we need to see that God's covenant makes provisions for his people.
[5:07] By his covenant, God provides for all the needs of his people. We're looking particularly at verses 1 to 8 here.

Perhaps we can read again verse 7. God said to Abraham, I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee and their generations for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.

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What's God saying there to Abraham? Abraham. He's saying, I'm going to make a covenant with you, Abraham. I'm going to make it. You can't make it. You're not able to provide in such a way so that we can be friends forever.
But I'm able to provide. I can make all the provisions for this covenant. And I can make such a covenant that it'll be an everlasting covenant when you or any of your seed come into this covenant with me, it will be forever.
And the people for whom I provide this covenant will know everlasting provision of my blessing that will be forever and ever in time and in eternity.
[6:35] God makes clear that it's he who provides all that is required for this wonderful relationship.

He makes it clear in a number of ways in these first eight verses. First of all, we see God suddenly appearing to Abraham. It's 13 years since God last appeared to Abraham in this dramatic sort of way as he did at the time of the birth of Ishmael.
The Bible remains silent about these intervening 13 years. We don't know whether God spoke in ways of special revelation during these 13 years.
But we see that now after these 13 years, he comes suddenly again into Abraham's life with particular provisions, particular promises and particular commands to Abraham.
This is a picture you see of the way that God works with his people. He works sovereignly. He's always in control when he brings people to be his friends and to be his Christian believers.
[8:02] It all depends on him. This is just one of the ways in which the Bible explains to us from beginning to end that salvation is of the Lord.

It's God alone who is able to provide salvation for sinners. That's why he has given us the Bible that we may be clear on this. and that's how it is such a terrible offence to the name of our God when we go our own way, when we get it into our head as we do so easily as sinners that in some way we can save ourselves or in some way we can convince God that we deserve that he remembers us and does us good.
The Bible turns these sinful ideas on their heads time and again and here again God is saying this is a covenant that is my covenant.
and I can care and give it to sinners as and when I please. That's the first thing about the fact that it's a covenant that makes provisions.
But the sort of provisions that God makes are also described to us here and we're helped to understand. We need to notice for instance that when God comes to Abram this time he comes with a new name.
[9:52] We've heard about names already today. And yes in the way that God works with his people names are important.

God gives us names for himself to help us to understand what he is like. God and as he comes to provide for Abram at this time he gives himself a new name when he comes to Abram that Abram may understand what sort of provision God is going to give him.
The Hebrew word for the name that is translated for us here I am the Almighty God God is El Shaddai. El Shaddai is the God that I am God said to Abraham that day.
It might be translated the God who is sufficient. I am not saying that I am the Almighty God is a bad translation.
No. But I think we can add to it. I am the Almighty God and that in my all mightiness I am sufficient and I alone am sufficient.
[11:20] In a way he was saying an Old Testament language to Abraham. What was said of Jesus by the apostles and Alistair reminded of this earlier this morning there is no other name given under heaven amongst men by which we must be saved.

I am the Almighty God I am El Shaddai only I am sufficient to provide for your deep needs as sinners before a holy God.
Abraham I am coming and despite the depth of your need as a sinner I am going to make a covenant with you and I am going to make you my friend because I am El Shaddai.
God was reminding Abraham of his frailty. Perhaps Abraham had been meditating on his frailty during these thirteen years.
Remember that Abraham made a mistake thirteen years ago and he was still living with the consequences during these thirteen years.

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[12:42] Ishmael growing up in his house who was not to be the child of the promise who wasn't the child of promise. Sarah and Hagar in their bitterness against one and each other still occupying his household and Abraham's frailty great man of God though he was was evident and God comes to Abraham I'm going to make a covenant with you however frail you feel Abraham and however your frailty has been emphasised to you as I have kept you waiting as is so often my purpose when I deal with my people so that we might recognise more keenly how needy we are now Abraham you are ready because I have made you ready to understand that I am

El Shaddai my might and my might alone my saving power as it will be finally fully revealed in the coming of my son Christ Jesus I am able to meet all of your need and you can be my friend frail and sinful and fragile though you are because I can provide and I am sufficient but not only does God come to make this covenant with a new name for himself I think he further emphasises to Abraham the provisions of this covenant by giving Abraham a new name he tells Abraham in these verses he tells him at verse 5 neither shall thy name anymore be called
Abraham but thy name shall be Abraham an extra a Jewish Hebrew syllable added it doesn't seem much of a difference but there's a difference Abraham perhaps meant the father of a people Abraham meant the father of a host of peoples or of hosts of people and that will be your name Abraham I'm coming to you with my grace with the sufficiency of my power and it's going to work in you Abraham so that you're going to be a new person whatever strength you had before it's going to be enlarged and increased by my coming to you and the great blessings that you can enjoy in this covenant relationship with me
I'm going to make you able for these blessings I'm going to work in you and the new name is the evidence of the work that I will do within you and that fits in with what God said to Abraham right at the beginning I am the almighty God Abraham walk before me and be thou perfect or be thou blameless we need to see the connection we need to see the order Abraham I am God almighty I am the one sufficient for all your frailty when you walk with me you will find that you are now able to walk in a way that will please me in a way that will lead to a blameless life because I am God almighty and I am coming to you with my love and with my power and with the sufficiency of my grace you'll no longer be merely
Abraham you'll be Abraham and then God also comes with promises for the future there's no time to read them but they're there from verses 5 to verse 7 and God piles on new promises for Abraham a man who was now at the age of 99 what future could he possibly have but of course God has kept him waiting till the age of 99 that it might magnify the sufficient mightiness of God to give whoever he will a great and a blessed and a sure future and if you will you can go through these promises that were given to Abraham at verses 5 to 7 and you can find that all these promises were realized although
[18:18] Abraham was 99 and it seemed absolutely impossible that he could have a seed by his barren wife Sarah the promises are all realized and indeed they are still being realized because it is El Shaddai the almighty God who comes to be the friend of his people how do we apply that to ourselves well I think we must apply it in this way we you see have the great blessing of not only having the old testament scriptures but having the new testament scriptures as well yes we read God saying to Abraham I will make an everlasting covenant with you but we now know how that everlasting covenant has been made sure and has been made new and has been made complete in the coming of the Lord

Jesus Christ you see when we come to the communion table for instance and we hear the words of Christ saying this cap is the new covenant in my blood we see more clearly than ever Abraham could see just how the everlasting God the El Shaddai God could prove his sufficiency for his people he did it in the coming of his son Jesus it's in the face of Jesus Christ that we see most clearly and most surely the character and the reality of El Shaddai the almighty God and we see clearly in the gospels that Jesus comes to those who are at the end of their tether he comes to those who feel their weakness who feel their frailty who feel that they could never be right with God because they have come to a recognition of how deep seated their sin is and how unholy they are in the sight of
God and we see this old El Shaddai God coming in the person of his son Christ Jesus and we see him pursuing sinful people those with whom he is going to enter into a covenant and we see him pursuing them to the cross we see him pursuing them there where there is the picture of how sinners are under the curse of almighty God how hopeless how helpless they are and Jesus goes

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there to the very end of their tether and he becomes tethered to their sin and to their curse and to their hopelessness and he takes it and he pays the price for it and he rises the almighty El Shaddai God and he comes to sinners at the end of their tether and he can come to you today if you are feeling at your lowest point be you Christian or non Christian he has power to transform you he has power to give you a new name because he has power to give you a new heart heart and he can say to you don't you see that my death is sufficient my death is the evidence my blood is the evidence that there's a new covenant a covenant that comes from the all sufficient almighty God believe trust in me yes perhaps

I'm talking to a Christian here who has backslidden who has become bitter perhaps against the church of Christ and it has taken its toll on your spiritual condition and it's been going on perhaps quietly for some time perhaps it's been going on 13 years or more since with Abram you last felt the Lord's presence in that special way and the El Shaddai God the Christ of glory is able to come to you today and he's able to remind you of his finished work on the cross and he's able to say I'm sufficient for you remember the covenant remember the provisions it's sufficient for you

[24:10] God's covenant makes stipulations we have no time to look at that this morning we'll perhaps consider it again they are here in the chapter very clearly going to leave them till another time I'm going to continue with this general theme and go on to the last point that I wanted to make this morning

I'm going to make you a new person Abraham and this covenant is exclusive to those who are born again to those who are renewed by the spirit of God but there's also an inclusiveness about the covenant.

There's an inclusiveness in God's call to sinners to believe and to repent. God says in all sorts of ways you don't need to exclude yourself because of what you are or because of what you wear or because of what particular sins you have or because of what particular personal weaknesses you have.

My covenant can deal with every sort of thing and every sort of background and any sort of difficulty.

My covenant can deal with it. If you will take that covenant and keep that covenant which I am calling you to through my son Christ Jesus.

[29:28] Can we just look just in a moment or two at the signs of what I've just been saying in this chapter here. Yes, there were to be those in Abram's house people from the Canaanite people round about him as he was a gnomon in that land whom he had brought into his house.

Perhaps he had even bought them as slaves and they were his servants. They were of the stranger. They belonged to heathendom in some way but they had come in and they also, the males amongst them were to be circumcised because God wanted to be made clear that this was an inclusive covenant.

And as he would reveal his purposes more in the future although it was to be for the Jew first it was also to be for the Gentile.

Would any of us here this morning have any hope if we had to be of the physical line of Abraham to be saved?

There are some visitors here this morning I don't know if any of you are Jewish people who are of the physical line of Abraham but I know that the most of us are not but even through Abram God is making clear that his covenant is for Jew and Gentile.

[30:58] He's telling us that children may be included in his covenant. Circumcision in the heathen nations round about in the days of Abram was a very common practice but it was kept for much later on not for when they were eight days old but much later on it was as it is and in many of these Middle Eastern countries to this day it was the sign of entering into manhood.

But God's circumcision as with baptism in our own day is a sign of entering into covenant with God. And even children can be excluded in their frailty before they are able to stand for themselves they can stand with their parents within the covenant.

That's the inclusiveness. That's the evidence that God is giving of the desire of his heart to save sinners and to make them his friends.

Sarah is included. It may be because of the role the different roles given to man and to woman and the less prominent role perhaps given to women at that time that it might be thought that they were in some way inferior.

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A thought of course that has spread throughout societies the sinful societies of our land including our own throughout the generations. and here God is showing that he is as for women as he is for men.
[32:43] Sarah also is given a new name. The name that means princess. Sarah also has her own unique and particular saving relationship with her God just as Abraham has.

And of course God comes to Abraham at a time when his faith is still struggling. When God tells Abraham as he does in this chapter that he is to have the son of promise through Sarah we read that he laughs he can hardly take it in.
It's so difficult his faith is struggling up to these heights to which God is drawing him on. But the covenant is for him.
Oh surely that's a comfort to many of us. There are all sorts of ways in which we who are the Lord's people already and our faith struggles.
There may be some that's here this morning who haven't yet trusted in Jesus and you have so many questions you have so many difficulties and it's such a struggle you feel to reach to the point of faith.
[34:06] God is coming to each one of us this morning whatever our struggles whatever makes us feel that in some way we're an outsider we're of the stranger and he's saying my covenant can be with you I've made provision for strangers I've made provision for all the sexes I've made provisions for those who find it such a struggle to believe and to obey and the provision is in my covenant the provision is in this agreement that was made sure and certain in my son Jesus whose blood was shed to make the covenant sure sure everything you could possibly need to be one of my friends and to be with me at last in glory is in that covenant everything that can deal with your sin all grace all power all enabling all faith all repentance it's all in this covenant package with Christ you cannot get to heaven you cannot be one of my people without it because you'll still be in your sin and you cannot get rid of your sin in your own strength but my covenant has all the provision and you must take it

God God emphasizes the inclusiveness of his desire in the making of his covenant in 2nd Peter chapter 3 and verse 9 the Lord does not slap concerning his promise or concerning his covenant as some men count slapness but is long suffering to us that's the reason that the last day the day of judgment hasn't yet come it's not that God has forgotten to come in his second coming it's not that God has forgotten that there will be the day of judgment the last day of this world when there will be no more opportunity to enter into the covenant God hasn't forgotten about that day and it's fixed and it's sure and it will come Peter is saying here that he's delaying he's left it off he's intentionally left a long time before his second coming because he's not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness but is long suffering not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance the covenant is there in Christ and you can be a friend of
God as Abram was a friend of God repent turn from your sin and go in prayer to the God of the covenant to El Shaddai the Lord Jesus Christ let's bow in prayer Almighty God we pray that you will convince us of the blessings and the glories of the covenant we pray that you will enable us to see what you have prepared for sinners in Jesus Christ we pray that you will enable us to see ourselves as sinners today whether we be your people or not yet your people may we be humbled before you in our sinfulness and in our need and oh almighty
God enable us whether for the first time or for the empteenth time to close in with your covenant to rest secure in Jesus Christ Amen

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