

When we hear the word covenant we have a pretty good understanding of what is being talked about. We have covenants with each other. If you've ever lived in a particular neighborhood you've had community covenants. There are even things in everyday life that function as a covenant such as holding the door open for others. But the covenants that God has given us are nothing like what we experience in covenants with each other. And for good reason, God is God and we are not. And yet, when we have questions or don't understand, God can and will work with us. This is what we can see in the story of Abram & Sarai becoming Abraham & Sarah.

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When last we left our ancestors they were moving into & out of Egypt after a severe famine. Before they left for Egypt God had promised the land to Abram's offspring. As we pick up in chapter 15 God makes the promise formal in a covenant rite. Abram's been struggling because the promise was of descendants and there were none except for the slave born into his house named Eliezer. God hears the worry and pain that Abram is feeling and sets him to preparing a ritual. Now Abram falls asleep after the preparation and other than preparing that is all that is asked of him. And yet God is faithful. God walks alone in the covenant. The sign is familiar to those of the times as one that would bring death to a person who violated the covenant. Let that sink in for a moment. God offered God's own life as proof that God was faithful and that Abram would have a son of his very own, not simply one that was born into his house. All too often we think of God's sacrifice as one that does not come until the New Testament. But God's love and devotion to God's people was not new in the New Testament. It goes all the way back to the beginning.

As God & Abram continue to walk more questions arise. When a child was not forthcoming for Abram with his wife Sarai, they agree to make it happen through Sarai's slave Hagar. We will go more in depth into the story of Hagar & Ishmael but God hears the pain of Sarai and in chapter 17 includes her specifically in the covenant. In fact God revises the covenant that Abram & Sarai together will be the parents, Abraham the father of a multitude of nations and Sarah the mother of nations and kings. To mark this revision God changes their name and includes a new name for God as well. God, Yahweh is now God Almighty in English or El Shaddai in Hebrew. And as God has revised the covenant asks Abraham and all males in his line for a sign of the covenant that they will keep.

The revision of covenant does not come without cost. It is no longer a promise that we can live with our minds alone but of whole being, mind, body & spirit. This is important for us because it is sometimes easy to keep our faith in our hearts or minds and not living them out in our body. When we live the promises of God with our heart, our mind, our soul and our strength (as the formula becomes later) we are all in, even if imperfect. The call to live a covenant life is one that we don't let go when it's hard or forget when it's easy. Covenant living is one that provides greatly but requires action on our part.

The promises in the covenant of Abraham were not instant promises. The promises of God are not immediately felt or known for Abram so much so that he questions God and those questions further clarify what is to come. In the days in which we are living now we have many questions, but I wonder if we are really open to what is before us. God in answering the questions of Abram cause changes on his part to live into the promises of

land & life for kingdoms to come. Abraham has to change in response. And the change is not without pain & sacrifice. As we have so many questions today on how to live through the coronavirus pandemic and working through race relations in our country we have to be willing to sacrifice and change. We have to be willing to let God work through creation so that we may have life and life abundantly.

The covenant of God is open to us all the question becomes are we willing to sacrifice in order to participate? As Christians we are called to love the Lord our God with our heart, our mind, our soul and our strength as well as love our neighbor as our self. To love God & neighbor completely means I must give up some of my wants. We see conflicting reports on how to live through the pandemic including the question of whether to wear masks. I wear a mask in public, not because I believe it will keep me and my family from being infected with the virus. I wear a mask to keep me from sharing the virus if I am infected. Is the mask comfortable, no. Is it the right thing to do to show love of everyone I meet? Yes. Abraham & Sarah both sacrificed to live into what God had promised. Will we follow after our Father Abraham? In the name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit. Amen.