

October 30, 2005

Forty Days of the Bible #5:

The Abraham-Christ Connection

(Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:15-29)

See this Bible? The way we bind books, everything comes together here at the back. That's where the pages and the cover meet and it's no surprise that bookbinders call this the *spine* of the book.

Not only do books have spines, but *the story inside also has a spine*. What I want to do today is show you **the very spine of the story of the Bible**. Two weeks ago, we saw that three words tell us the basic pattern of the Bible. Those three words were

CREATION
FALL
REDEMPTION.

Now that's a *pattern*, but it's not a *story*. It gives a hint of the story, but it's not the whole story by any means.

In the **Walk Thru the Bible** Seminar last week, George Wood showed us the themes and events that tell the story of the Old Testament. And he hinted at how the Old Testament and New Testament stories are related. But what I want to do is show that the whole Bible tells **one basic story**.

We're used to hearing about Bible *stories*. You know, Adam and Eve and Noah's ark and David and Goliath and Daniel in the Lion's Den and Jesus born in Bethlehem and so on. All these *stories* are little pieces in the puzzle of the One Big Story of the Bible. And that One Big Story can be summed up as **the Abraham-Christ connection**.

There are two passages of the Scripture that bookend this story: one from the Old Testament, and a crucial passage from the New Testament that interprets that Old Testament event and shows how it all works together.

First, turn to Genesis 12:1-3:

*1The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.
2"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
3I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

Sometime between 1800 and 1600 BC, God had spoken to Abram (later to be known as Abraham) about leaving the land of his father and going to a land of promise. God said that there, in that new land, he would make Abram's descendants into a great nation, making them in a worldwide blessing. Those who bless that nation would be blessed; those who curse that nation would be cursed, and, very significantly, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Now we could talk about all kinds of things about the promises God made to Abraham. But we can do way better than that! God's own word talks about it. In his letter to the believers in the province of Galatia, Paul speaks at length about the promises to Abraham and shows how this is beginning of the blessings we now enjoy and celebrate in and through Jesus Christ. Turn to Galatians 3. We're going to work our way from Galatians 3:15-29.

There are three key ideas in this passage. Let's list them and then work back through them.

1. The promises God made to Abraham lead straight to Jesus Christ (15-18)
2. The law of Moses came later to teach us just how bad sin is and how much we need a Savior, a spiritual rescuer (19-25)
3. God's family now is a family based on faith, not a blood descent from Abraham. We become part of that forever family through faith in Jesus (26-29)

OK, one at a time:

The promises God made to Abraham lead straight to Jesus Christ (15-18)

15Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. 16The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. 17What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. 18For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

OK, this is going to be a whole lot easier to understand knowing what the problem is Galatia that Paul is writing about. The church in Galatia had made a huge mistake and was in crisis for it. After Paul had come through the area preaching the Good News about Jesus, others came after him and told them that in order to please God, they had to observe the

whole Law of Moses. In effect, they were saying that to be a good Christian, you needed to be a good Jew first. So they said that the men needed to be circumcised, they all needed to keep a kosher table, and they needed to keep the Sabbath and the calendar of Jewish holy days.

When Paul about this, he was *ripped!* He knew that if they fell for this, it would be like taking the whole Good News of Jesus and throwing it out. It would just be eating a Moses burger with just a dash of Jesus sauce! What they were doing was turning the whole gospel of Jesus upside down.

What Paul does is show that the whole Law of Moses was a *temporary* thing. There was a man before Moses whose faith is way more relevant to a New Covenant Jesus-follower than Moses and his Law. His name was Abraham.

What God did was make a special set of promises to Abraham. We call these promises a *covenant*. It's kind of like a contract or an agreement except for this: God *gave* Abraham this covenant; He didn't negotiate it! It's not like God and Abraham haggled over the terms and then shook hands. God set forth the covenant and *gave it* to Abraham. And then God bound *Himself* to fulfill this covenant, with all its promises.

Paul wants us to think about two things in these verses. First, beyond Abraham, who was the Abraham covenant for? Second, did the coming of the Law of Moses cancel the Abraham covenant?

Look at what Paul says in Galatians 3:16:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to

seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

Three times in Genesis (the references are in the outline)¹, God made Abraham a promise that his "seed" (his descendant) would be the one who received all the promises. Paul makes a big deal out of the fact that the promise was to a single descendant—not to "many people." And that single descendant was none other than Jesus Christ.

So all the promises made to Abraham comes to Jesus and, as we'll see, to Jesus' people (that's us). But there's a second point that Paul wants to make sure we get.

God made a covenant with Abraham. But 430 years later He made another covenant, this time with Moses—that covenant established the whole system of laws and sacrifices that we find all over the Old Testament. Here's the question: did the Moses covenant cancel the Abraham covenant?

Here's the answer, according to Paul (Galatians 3:17-18):

*17What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, **does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.** 18For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; **but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.***

The Moses covenant involves a lot of work. It was designed for a variety of purposes: to teach us how badly we needed a Savior, a Messiah. But it was also for a nation for a brief period of time: from Moses (say around 1300

¹ Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 24:7.

BC) to the death and resurrection of Jesus (30 AD). The Moses covenant is *kaput*, done, over, *finito*. It's run its course. But the New Covenant in Jesus is the extension and fulfillment of the Abraham covenant. It's a matter of what God has promised. And it's received by simple faith.

In Galatians 3:6, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, saying this about Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Abraham wasn't made right before God by any law-keeping, but by simple faith in the promises of God—exactly the way we are made right with God through Jesus Christ. In Abraham's case, his faith looked to the future, to the coming of the Savior; in our case, our faith looks first to the past, to the Savior, Jesus, who has already come, and forward to the return of Jesus to finish His work in our lives and in our world.

Now on to the next part here in Galatians (3:19-25):

The Law of Moses came later to teach us just how bad sin is and how much we need a Savior, a spiritual rescuer

Paul is going to say something amazing: the reason God added the Moses covenant after the Abraham covenant was to trap us, to corner us—to make it clear how much we need Jesus:

19What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. 20A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.

*21*Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God [as seen in the Abraham covenant]? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. *22*But **the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin**, so that what was promised, being given through **faith** in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who **believe**.

*23*Before this faith came, **we were held prisoners by the law, locked up** until faith should be revealed. *24*So the **law** was put in charge **to lead us to Christ** that we might be justified by **faith**. *25* **Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.**

Get the picture: we human beings learn slowly. The Law was added to make us learn just how bad our situation is apart from God's grace. But it moves us onward to the point of embracing Jesus, the Messiah-Savior, when He comes.

Let's put it this way: God added the Law, and created the people of Israel so that there would be one country on earth that fully understood these things:

1. God is **holy**. He doesn't compromise when it comes to sin. He is high and exalted and won't have anything to do with sin.
2. People are **sinners**. We don't meet God's standards. That was made clear with all those laws of holiness, all those laws of sacrifice, and the constant reminder of how separated we are, in our nature, from God.
3. Therefore, **we need a Savior**, a Rescuer, a Redeemer—someone to bridge the gap Holy God and Sinful People.

So when Jesus is born smack dab in the middle of Israel, His arrival isn't exactly a surprise. As a matter of fact, His coming met the crying need of the hearts of the devout Jewish men and women who knew how holy God is, and how bad sin is, and how much we need a spiritual rescuer. And the words of the angels we hear at Christmas time point us right in that direction (Luke 2:11):

Today in the town of David a Savior (rescuer, redeemer) has been born to you; he is Christ (Messiah) the Lord.

Now, because He has come, everything is settled, and we can have full peace with God. What started out for Abraham has been passed through the experience of the nation of Israel and now has exploded outward for the whole world through Jesus, the Son of God.

That brings us to the last part of the "spine" of the story of the Bible: the coming of Jesus. Galatians 3:26-29 tells us that...

God's family now is a family based on faith, not a blood descent from Abraham. We become part of that forever family through faith in Jesus.

Read Galatians 3:26-29:

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Paul tells us that the promises God gave to Abraham goes right to Jesus, that He's the "seed" (descendant) that gets all the promises.

It zips right by the Moses covenant, which was after all, just a temporary thing, a step in the unfolding plan of God.

Now a revolutionary thing has happened. Being a blood descendant of Abraham is no longer important. What matters is being a **faith descendant** of Abraham. It doesn't matter if you're Jewish or German or Chinese or Mexican or Egyptian or Greek or American. What matters is that you have that "Abraham faith" in God's Rescuer, Jesus the Messiah.

And when we have that faith, we become God's children. We actually become you might say, "spiritual Jews." We become "Abraham's seed" become when we put our faith in Christ, we are said to be "in Christ." So now, all the promises are *ours* as well. We now become that nation promised to Abraham that blesses the whole world. We become the promised children of Abraham.

And that's story the Bible was telling from the beginning.

There's a large portion of Romans that deals with the same issues Paul addresses here in Galatians—all about Abraham's faith and how God's promises now flow all to all who have the faith of Abraham through Jesus the Messiah. In Romans 2:28-29, Paul writes,

*28A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29No, a man is a Jew if he is one **inwardly**; and circumcision is circumcision of the **heart**, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*

The old, physical Israel is not the center of God's plan. Old Israel is not the "spine" of the Bible! Jesus and the New Israel is the "spine"

of the Bible! The whole book is about Him and His people. And His people, the New Israel, are those who put their trust in Him no matter what their bloodline is. No wonder Paul concludes Galatians (6:14-16) by saying,

*14 May I never boast except in **the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 **Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything**; what counts is a **new creation**. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, **even to the Israel of God**.*

The Israel of God; that's the real family of God! So often we end up again looking at the fact that God's intention from all eternity was to make a **family** for Himself. That's what you were created for. That's what God's been doing for thousands of years here on earth. That's what the Bible is all about.

Are you a part of God's family? Have you put your trust in God—in what He did through His Son Jesus, to rescue you from your sins and forgive you and to make you part of His family? There's no day like **today** to do that!

ABCDE

Let's pray.

Dear God, I realize that if it weren't for you, I wouldn't be alive. And I thank you so much that You did so much to make me a part of Your family. I admit that I focused on my plans for my life, not yours. Thank you for showing me Your plan in the Bible. Thank you that you cared for me even when I didn't know you or even want to know You. I want a life filled with meaning. I want to start by getting to know you better. So as best as I understand, I ask you, Jesus Christ, to come

into my life and help me to understand your purposes for me. I want to take the first step today. In your name I pray, Amen.