

We are pursuing this difficult concept of 'Covenant' because understanding it will help to orientate and inform us as we grapple with the Old Testament. So far we have learnt from God's covenant with:

- Adam:** Covenant is a commitment God makes with Himself, for our benefit. Adam is called to relationship with God but disobeys Him so that that now relationship between God and man is in the context of human wickedness.
- Noah:** Violence and injustice was so bad that God sent a flood to rid the world of wickedness but in His grace preserved Noah's family. He covenants with Noah to patient mercy with humanity, waiting for our repentance
- Abram:** Wickedness proliferates so God calls Abram out, promising him a new land, descendants and the privilege of being a blessing to everyone. Abram is renamed as 'Abraham', the Father of many Nations.

1. Abraham's Family is established. Genesis 15.

- Verses 1-6: God promises the childless Abraham he will have a son with his wife Sarai.
- Verses 7-16: God promises Abraham land, but not yet. His family will be enslaved for 400 years before rescue
- Verses 17-21: God promises Abraham's family the land of Canaan. And it all happened!
- Abraham is blessed with a son, Isaac and twin grandsons: Esau and Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons and a daughter and during an encounter with God he had his name changed to Israel: 'one who wrestles with God and with men'. His 12 sons headed up the 12 tribes of Israel and they all ended up in Egypt in a time of famine

2. Moses and the Exodus.

- After 400 years the nation of Israel was huge, the Egyptians felt intimidated and ill-treated them and an Israeli orphan called Moses had an encounter with God appointing him to rescue Israel from Egypt.
- **Read Exodus 6: 6-8.** Israel's covenant-keeping God is affirming all His previous promises, I AM the LORD.
- Then came the plagues, the wilderness wanderings, the giving of the 10 commandments on Mount Sinai and their expansion into numerous laws about food, sex, work and living. The law marks out the Israelites as a 'peculiar people' who will reveal God to creation so that All Nations will be blessed. *

3. The Second reading of the Law: the Book of Deuteronomy.

- After 40 years of wilderness wandering Moses, who knows he won't see the land himself, gives a series of addresses before his death. The Ten Commandments are reiterated, religious, civil and social laws are adapted from wilderness laws and Moses appeals to the nation to obey them. Chapters 27:13 through to 30 tell of the blessings or curses that go with the nation's behaviour, and Moses renews the Covenant
- **Read Deuteronomy 30: 1-10.** The amazing thing is that God knows the Israelites will not obey the law: even in the covenant there is the expectation of failure & the promise to restore the repentant **vv. 1-5**.
- Disobedience means discipline for the Israelites and for us but **Hebrews 12:4b** tells us not to lose heart when we fail and God seems far away. Discipline is not about of God's exasperation, it's about restoration; it's an expression of His love and welcome and of my vocation in Him as my Heavenly Father. Sin doesn't alienate us but determines our need for 'discipline' which shares a root with 'discipleship'.
- **Verse 6:** May mean God wants us to be soft, vulnerable and sensitive to Him all the time, not just when we are worshipping with a great hymn or at 'Forever reign'. He wants us always compassionate and intimate with Him even on the tube, in a British downpour, struggling with children or mowing the lawn.

4. New Testament Encouragements.

- **Philippians 1:3-6.** Our Covenant-making God is faithful and confident in us, He will bring us to maturity.
- **2 Timothy 2: 11-13.** God is faithful to both His promises and His warnings for He cannot disown Himself.
- The invitation to the Christian faith is to union: we become One in Christ, One with the Father, One with the Holy Spirit so we can live in unity with the covenant making, faithful God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Points to ponder:

1. * *Understanding the Old Testament in the context of God's covenant with Israel and realising that God speaks to us in the Bible in the way the people of the time understood it should help us as we think it through. The Israelites in Abraham and Moses' time were living in eras of 'suzerainty', when weaker powers were offered protection from stronger ones in return for their submission. In a way, God is doing the same for Israel.*
2. *We seem to be living in an era of rapid political meltdown! Our faithful God loves us, saves us, never fails or forsakes us and keeps us in unity with Him to the end. When we hear Him speak, let's not harden our hearts.*