

GATECITY CHURCH

CRY OUT: God's Covenantal Love for Israel

May 7, 2023 – Hannah Stevens

I. Why Israel?

- A. Israel matters to us, because Israel matters to God. It is through His devoted love and commitment to the wayward nation of Israel over thousands of years that God reveals to all of mankind His incredible, never-ending faithfulness.
1. God must remain true to Himself, to His nature. As such, it is not possible for Him to not be faithful.
 2. "God, being who He is, cannot cease to be what He is, and being what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself. He is at once faithful and immutable, so all His words and acts must be and must remain faithful. Men become unfaithful out of desire, fear, weakness, loss of interest, or because of some strong influence from without. Obviously, none of these forces can affect God in any way. He is His own reason for all He is and does. He cannot be compelled from without, but ever speaks and acts from within Himself by His own sovereign will as it pleases Him." (pg 79, Knowledge of the Holy, A.W. Tozer).
- B. God's Faithfulness is most clearly revealed biblically in His eternal commitment to the nation of Israel.
1. If one is in doubt of God's faithfulness in one's own life, one only need take a look at God's immutable, unwavering commitment to the nation of Israel. When you take a look at the Scriptures in their entirety, Israel is not a side issue. Israel is *the* issue. From beginning to end, God is pursuing a people for Himself, a people for His own possession. God is looking for a people that He can give Himself to as their exceedingly great reward.

Genesis 15:1 "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

2. The more we understand God's heart for Israel, the more we will understand God Himself. When we love someone, we want to know them. We want to understand the things they love.
3. Caves and Vegetables

C. God's Burning Bridegroom Heart

1. God's Faithfulness to Israel comes of His own choice and His own initiative. But just as importantly, it comes out of His burning, passionate heart.
2. Throughout the Scriptures, God uses tender imagery and romantic language in His description and thoughts towards His chosen people. When you read the intensity of His thoughts as revealed by the prophets, I think it is safe to say that we underestimate God's zeal and passionate love for Israel.

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Zechariah 8:2 “This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.””

Zechariah 1:14 ‘So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out. Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.’ (ESV)

Isaiah 54:5 “For your Maker is your husband, The Lord of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.”

3. God is filled with the burning jealousy of a bridegroom for the people of Israel. He wants them to be His and His alone.

Deuteronomy 14:2 “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

4. For all God's pursuit of the nation of Israel, they have been wayward. They have sought the affections of others and not devoted themselves to God.

Jeremiah 3:1 ““They say, ‘If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again?’ Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; Yet return to Me,” says the Lord.”

Jeremiah 3:14 “Return, O backsliding children,” says the Lord: “for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.”

Romans 10:21 “But to Israel he says: “All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

5. God will do whatever it takes for the bride to have her bridegroom. The bridegroom has fully extended himself, but she has not received Him. This hardening has provided the opportunity in history for the Gentiles to come and receive Him.

Romans 11:11 “I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.”

6. God will do whatever it takes to win Israel's heart, whether by provoking them through jealousy, keeping them unsatisfied or shaking the earth with end-times judgments until they exclaim “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Hosea 2:7 “She will chase her lovers, But not overtake them; Yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.’”

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Luke 13:34-35 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! 35 Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

- a. Catch the yearning heart of Jesus in this Scripture.
- b. Like a rejected suitor, Jesus laments and grieves. He does not relish in the judgment that’s coming but longs to be a source of protection and covering for the people of Israel, but they did not want Him.
 - i. How many human lovers would have given up with such a rejecting beloved?
- c. Jesus is a burning, Bridegroom God. He has chosen and pledged Himself to the nation of Israel, and He will not stop His pursuit until all of Israel sees and recognizes Him for who He is.

Zechariah 12:10 “Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.”

II. Love Displayed Through Covenant

- A. God demonstrates both his Faithfulness and also Zealous Love in the context of Covenant. It would be one thing to be faithful without love. It would be another to be loving without faithfulness. But God is fully Love and fully Faithful. He can not stop being either because they are who He is. The Faithful love of God is Covenantal Love.
- B. We most often hear the language of covenant today as it relates to Marriage.
 1. A covenant means a binding agreement, a legal contract. It is a seal between two or more parties. In a biblical sense, the word covenant derives from the same root word meaning “to cut.” This means that in the culture of the Bible, covenant carried weight and was often cut, or sealed, in blood.”

III. God's Covenantal Love for Israel

- A. There are Seven Covenantal Promises of God to Man in Scriptures. These seven covenants fall into four categories—conditional, unconditional, and general and specific. Conditional covenants are based on certain obligations and prerequisites; if the
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requirements are not fulfilled, the covenant is broken. Unconditional covenants are made with no strings attached and will be kept regardless of one party's fidelity or infidelity. General covenants are not specific to one people group and can involve a wide range of people while specific covenants are for only the party named. This morning we are going to briefly look at the first four covenants mentioned in Scripture.

1. **The Adamic Covenant** (made with Adam, who stood for all of creation) is God's declaration to save the created order from the enemies of sin and death that were introduced into the natural realm. This covenant reveals the kindness and mercy of God to destroy every one of our enemies and establish mankind in complete victory and redemption.

Genesis 3:15 "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

2. **The Noachic Covenant** (made with Noah, who stood for all nations of the earth) is God's declaration to show mercy by committing to never again cover the earth in judgment that destroys every living creature – no matter how wicked or corrupt living creatures become. God declares to Noah, in essence, that He will find a way to show mercy even if there seems to be no possible way to do so.

Genesis 9:11 "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth."

3. **The Abrahamic Covenant** (made with Abraham, who stood for Israel) is God's declaration to save all of the families of the earth through the bloodline of one family. All of the peoples of the earth would be judged based on their relationship with this family – as they are the key to God's plan to redeem all of creation itself. This covenant reveals that God is committed to establish all families into one glorious family of the redeemed.

Genesis 15:1 "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

- a) It is striking that God initiates this covenant by offering Himself as Abraham's greatest reward. This reveals the value which he places on His people, that He would offer Himself to them. Ultimately, God Himself is our greatest inheritance and reward – and we are His.
- b) In Genesis 15, God declares to Abraham His desire to give him the land of Canaan (modern day Israel) to possess – ultimately all of the land from the Nile river to the Euphrates river would belong to Abraham and his descendants. God also affirms again His desire to bring forth a Messiah from Abraham's family line. Abraham, advanced in age with no heir, believes God when the Lord affirms that he would indeed produce children, and that his offspring would outnumber the

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stars in the heavens; thus Abraham was considered by God a righteous man (Gen. 15:6). Abraham responds to God's invitation and reassurance with a deep "yes", followed by a key question: "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" In answering the question of Abraham, God initiates a covenant with him.

Genesis 15: 8-12, 17-18 "8 He said, "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?" 9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. 11 The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. 12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.... 17 It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land. From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates..."

- c) Typically, a covenant is an agreement and an exchange between two parties, each doing their part to keep the covenantal commitment. In this case, God commands Abraham to gather and cut in two three animals (a cow, a goat, and a ram) as well as laying out two birds, protecting the pieces from birds of prey while awaiting God's response. God responds in an unusual manner – He does not have Abraham walk through the pieces with Him; instead he subjects Abraham to a "deep sleep" in which "dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.
- d) Then, God passes through the pieces of flesh Himself as a "smoking fire pot" and a "flaming torch" (representing the Presence of God) – thus God makes a covenant guaranteeing Abraham's future, and the future of his descendants, fully based on His own initiative. He knew Abraham would not be able to fulfill his part of the bargain, so He alone bound Himself to the covenant. Later on, God would change Abraham's name and give him the sign of the covenant – circumcision (Genesis 17). Abraham's future – and the future of his children and family – was fully in the hands of God.

Psalm 103:14 "For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust."

- e) God is mindful of our frailty and weakness. His commitment to us is greater than our ability to meet His requirements. His desire for us is so great, that He is willing to bridge the gap Himself, to make a way so that we can be with Him, that we can commune with Him.
4. **The Mosaic Covenant** (made with Moses, who stood for Israel) is God's declaration that men need to be saved – the law functions as a "tutor" (Galatians 3:24) that reveals how sinful all men are and how desperately they need help from God. The law reveals how holy God is and how far men are from that holiness. The Mosaic

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covenant reveals that God desires deep, close, and tender intimacy with men – yet it also reveals the impossibility of that nearness because of man's corruption and wickedness. The covenant God made with Moses reveals a plan to come near to men and dwell with them.

Exodus 19:5-7 "5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

- a) Only hearts that loved, feared and served the Lord would be able to carry out the requirements of the Law. Israel did not have what it took, by their own self-effort, to follow God in such a way, but they did not recognize this. In fact, rather than ask for grace, they responded by saying, "all that the Lord has said, we will do" (Ex. 19:8, 24:3, 24:7).
 - (1) God's whole purpose in the law was to lovingly point out to them their inability to live according to the standard He had set for them. The people of Israel missed this truth, and instead leaned into their own ability to work out their own righteousness.
- b) God had chosen Israel to be a special people, above all others on the earth. They were not chosen because there was anything special about them; but God chose them to keep the promise He'd made to Abraham made 430 years earlier (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). He brought them into the wilderness to provide protection for them through the Law (and point out their weakness); but also to set His affection upon them—if they would receive Him fully. Sadly, only a few of that generation were willing or ready to do what it would take to receive Him fully, men like Moses and Joshua. The rest of Israel was not able to come near to the burning mountain, because their hearts were not yet ready to receive Him.
- c) The day is coming, however, when all of Israel will be ready to receive their God.

Romans 11:26 "and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,"The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." 27 "This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

- d) On the mountaintop, God reveals His name to Moses. His unchanging nature demands that His revealed character remain true, regardless of how Israel responds to His invitation for intimacy.

Exodus 34:6 "5 Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and

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truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

- e) The word for goodness (or lovingkindness) in this passage is the word "Chesed." Chesed can be defined "faithful love in action." God's lovingkindness extended to Israel is that sure love which will not let Israel go. Not all Israel's persistent waywardness could ever destroy it. Though Israel is faithless, God remains faithful still. "Chesed" is the covenant love between God and Israel.

Nehemiah 9:16 "They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love [chesed]. Therefore, you did not desert them."

Isaiah 54:10 "Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love [chesed] for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you."

IV. The Fulfillment and the Promise

- A. We have looked at the first four covenants God has made in Scriptures. We will look at the remaining three next week.
- B. The fulfillment of all of the covenantal vows across thousands of years of history are still ahead of us. But they are certain. God is Faithful to His Word and to His promises, and His zeal for the children of Abraham is no less than it was 4000 years ago when God showed Abraham the stars and promised him descendants innumerable. There are three irrevocable parts to this coming promise. 1) All of Israel will be saved. 2) Jesus will rule and reign from Jerusalem. 3) Israel will be the head nation in all of the earth.
- C. The bridegroom will have His bride, even if the whole earth must be shaken. God is a lovesick faithful bridegroom, and He will not relent until Israel has willingly given themselves to Him.

V. The Invitation

- A. We have an opportunity these next 21 days to step into knowing God's heart for Israel in a deeper way. Will we love the things that He loves? Will we mourn with Him over lost Jerusalem, who has chosen her own way and not received Jesus as Messiah? Will we feel the burnings in Christ's heart for His people? We cannot pray for what we don't love.