

CALLED TO BE HIS PEOPLE, PROMISED A SAVIOR

BACKGROUND READING

The story of the Christian Faith is a love story, and the main characters are God and His people. Like any epic love story, the story of our Faith is filled with discovery, generosity, tenderness, intimacy, drama, pain, guilt, mercy, and forgiveness. But unlike any other story of love, God, the pursuer, is unfailingly faithful to His beloved, His Chosen People, us, despite His beloved's persistent unfaithfulness.

We encounter this love story first and foremost in Scripture. The Bible is the written record of the story of our salvation. We call this Salvation History because God made Himself known in specific ways, to prepare His people for the gift of salvation.

God chose for Himself a people to whom He would reveal His plan for salvation. These people – the Israelites (the Jews) – were the ones through whom the Savior would come. This time in the history of God's people was a time of waiting and preparing. It was a time of beginning to know the God of all creation and of coming to understand God's plan for salvation.

One Holy Couple: The Covenant with Adam

God entered into a series of covenants, or solemn promises that create family bonds, with mankind. The first covenant was with the first man, Adam. God settled Adam in the Garden of Eden, told him to care for it, and called Adam to share in His blessings in the marriage covenant. Adam was free to eat of any tree except one. Adam broke the terms of the covenant through his disobedience. But as we learned in lesson three, God did not abandon His children after the fall. His mercy would continue to be revealed through covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, and would ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

One Holy Family: The Covenant with Noah

Many years after Adam and Eve sinned, humanity had become almost completely corrupt. God decided to flood the earth and

start over. God chose Noah, a righteous man, to build an ark to preserve two of every animal. God pledged to keep Noah and his family safe from the flood waters and then promised He would never flood the earth again. The sign of this covenant was a rainbow.

One Holy Tribe: The Covenant with Abraham

In Genesis 12:1-3, God gave Abram a threefold blessing:

“The LORD said to Abraham: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will find blessing in you.”

God made Abraham three promises: a land (or nation), a name (or dynasty), and a worldwide blessing. God told Abraham (then 100 years old) that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. A year later, Abraham’s 90-year-old wife Sarah gave birth to Isaac. God tested Abraham’s faith by telling him to offer up his only son as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed, and God spared Isaac and rewarded Abraham for his great faith. Isaac married and had two sons; one of them, Jacob, had 12 sons. God later changed Jacob’s name to Israel, and from his sons came the 12 tribes of Israel.

One Holy Nation: The Covenant with Moses

The fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham of a land/nation was fulfilled in the Mosaic covenant (or covenant with Moses).

Many years passed and God’s Chosen People had become slaves in Egypt. God chose Moses to be the instrument of their deliverance to the Promised Land. God appeared to Moses in a bush that was burning but was not consumed by the fire. God said, “Now, go! I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). The story of Exodus contains some of God’s most awesome miracles: the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, and the revelation of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments became the terms of the Covenant with His Holy Nation: the Israelites. As always, the people were not always faithful to God’s commandments, but God kept His promises. After years of wandering in the desert, they reached the Promised Land of Canaan, which God had pledged to Abraham in Genesis 17:8.

A Holy Kingdom: The Covenant with David

The fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham of a name/dynasty was fulfilled in the Davidic covenant (or, covenant with David).

King David was descended from Judah, one of the 12 sons of Jacob. God spoke through the Prophet Nathan as recorded in 2 Samuel 7 as well as summarized in 1 Chronicles 17:11-14: "When your days have been completed and you must join your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you who will be one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He it is who shall build me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me, and I will not withdraw my favor from him as I withdrew it from the one who was before you; but I will maintain him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be firmly established forever." God promised that the Messiah would come from David's line and that His throne would be everlasting.

A People Waiting

Even after God made a covenant with David, David's son Solomon did not remain faithful. After a time he fell into idolatry and oppressed the people. The result was strife, division, and

exile. During that time God raised up many prophets to speak for Him: to preach His word and to call the Jews to repentance. Eventually they were brought back to their land and were able to rebuild and continue to wait for the promised Messiah.

All this time, God was preparing His chosen ones for a greater deliverance still to come; prefiguring the deliverance of the New Covenant to be brought through His Son, Jesus Christ. The New Covenant in Christ would fulfill all other covenants and offer eternal life to all who believe.

From the time of Adam and Eve's sin, until the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the people waited. They had faith in God's promise and allowed Him to change them and prepare them for His great salvation. We, too, are a people waiting. And like the Israelites, in order for us to receive fully the freedom from sin that Jesus won on the Cross for us, we, too, must allow God to convert us and prepare our hearts to be filled more and more with His grace.