

Our Covenant God – Part Fifteen

A pattern is established: Twelve sons become twelve fathers

At the end of Genesis 22, Nahor's twelve sons are listed. Nahor was Abraham's brother. His sons were: Huz, Buz, Kemuel, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlap, Bethuel, Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah. Bethuel was the father of Rebekah.

This paragraph serves two main purposes. Firstly, it introduces us to Rebekah and secondly, it reveals a pattern: the pattern of twelve.

We have seen the pattern of twelve before. In Genesis 17:20 God promised Abraham that Ishmael would have twelve sons and that they would be princes. This is exactly what did happen. Ishmael's twelve sons are listed in Genesis 25:13-14.

Then in Genesis 35:22-26 we find that Abraham's grandson, Jacob (Israel), had twelve sons. The twelve tribes of Israel came from these twelve sons of Jacob. Jesus had twelve disciples. The woman in Revelation 12 who gives birth to a boy child has a garland of twelve stars on her head. The woman is Israel, the boy child is Jesus, and the twelve stars are the twelve tribes of Israel. In Revelation 21, the heavenly city of Jerusalem has twelve gates with twelve angels at the twelve gates and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written on them. The wall of the city has twelve foundations, bearing the names of Jesus' twelve apostles. The city's measurements are twelve thousand furlongs cubed. The Tree of Life bears twelve fruits.

Multiples of twelve are important too. In Genesis 6:3 we see that God shortened mankind's lifespan to 120 (12x10) years. Moses died at exactly 120 years of age. There were about 120 people in the upper room in Acts 1 who received the Holy Spirit.

There were twenty-four (12 x 2) divisions of priests in 1 Chronicles 24:4. In Revelation 4 we find twenty-four thrones around the throne of God and twenty-four elders who worship God. Seventy-two (12x6) elders, when one includes Eldad and Medad, were given a portion of God's spirit that rested on Moses, and they prophesied in Numbers 11:24-26.

In Revelation 7 we find that 144 000 (12 x 12 x 1000) people, consisting of twelve thousand people from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, are sealed as servants of God.

The importance of the number twelve is evident in the effort to maintain that number. When Levi ceased to be counted among the tribes of Israel because they were separated out as priests, the Joseph tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, were counted separately to keep the number twelve intact. Similarly, in the New Testament, when Judas Iscariot committed suicide, the eleven moved quickly to add another to keep their number at twelve.

What then does the number twelve symbolize? Many books say that it refers to rulership and government. I would agree but I think it means more than that because the twelve are the first fathers of a nation. They are royalty because they are kings under their King, who is God. Their Kingdom position would not be established by military conquest but rather through birth and fatherhood.

A father is one who produces 'after his own kind'. There are two types of fathers. One type is a natural physical father who has become a father through the natural or adoptive process. The second type of father is often not a physical relative at all. Instead, that type of father is a pioneer in a field. Anyone who follows in that person's footsteps can call him father. For example, we call Abraham our father because we follow in his footsteps of faith. Jesus said that the hypocritical Pharisees were of their father, the devil, because they were liars just as the devil is a liar. Paul called Timothy his son because, even although they were not physically related, Timothy was following in Paul's footsteps. Pilots could call the Wright brothers their fathers while physicists could call Isaac Newton their father and inventors might call Thomas Edison their father.

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The role of a father is:

1. To provide the seed to produce the child.

(A side note: Ancient people did not understand the concept of a female ovum. They thought that the father was the sole contributor of the seed that would grow into an embryo. They considered the mother to only be an incubator for the male's seed. The first record I can find of people even questioning the possibility that the mother might contribute genetically to the child is in the days of Aristotle when it was a matter of hot dispute. Aristotle himself opposed the concept of female seed but it was accepted by some of his peers. Even today remnants of this misconception is found in the Church for many believe that a child inherits his or her blood from the father even although no statement to that effect was made in the Word of God and science has proven that it is biologically incorrect. God is not ignorant; He knows how He made men and women. In fact, the Bible made reference to the seed of a woman in the very beginning. Nevertheless, while we understand that every gene that the father's sperm contributes to the embryo has a complementary gene contributed by the mother's egg, we have to interpret the Bible in the light of the understanding of the people of the day in which it was written. Ultimately, we do all come from one Father, being God.)

2. To teach the child.
3. To discipline the child.
4. To give the child a name.
5. To give the child an inheritance.

The apostle Paul spoke of himself as a father of those in the churches he had planted. He provided the seed, being the Word of God, and sowed it into people's lives, making countless converts. He traveled from city to city doing this. As we can see in the book of Acts, which was written by Luke who traveled with Paul, as well as in Paul's epistles, he taught and disciplined his converts in a very fatherly manner. Even when Paul was absent from his children, he never left them fatherless. He set up others and trained them to look after the churches in each of those cities and he wrote many letters to them. In fact, even when Paul was beaten and jailed he still wrote his letters to the churches. He was a true father. A dog produces a dog. A lion produces a lion. A pelican produces a pelican. "Make disciples" really means "become fathers to many" because you cannot make a disciple if you do not father them because 'like produces like'.

When Paul had to write to the Corinthian church to correct them, he wrote as a father to his children:

1 Corinthians 4:14-17 (NKJV) I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you*. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

The most important attribute of a father is that he loves his children. Today American society and the Church both have a father deficit and we see this in many other countries too. Society teaches us that the absence of a father in a home produces children who don't know who they are. He might be there physically but if he does not fulfill the role of a father it is just as bad as if he were absent. His children have been set up to fail in life. They have few good role models to follow. Alas, it is the same in the Church.

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Homework Question #1: Consider the following verses:

John 14:15-20 (NKJV) “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

Psalm 10:14 (NKJV) But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, To repay *it* by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless.

Psalm 68:5-6 (NKJV) A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, *Is* God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; But the rebellious dwell in a dry *land*.

Psalm 22:9-10 (NKJV) But You *are* He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust *while* on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You *have been* My God.

Psalm 27:9-11 (NKJV) Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me. Teach me Your way, O LORD, And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.

Proverbs 3:12 (NKJV) For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

If someone has been deprived of a father’s love and care, naturally or spiritually, is there any hope for them and if so, how can the role of a father be fulfilled in their lives?

Fathers produce sons. Sons grow up and become fathers who produce sons. This is the cycle of life. This is how it is meant to be, both naturally as well as in the Church today. We cannot stay needy children. We must grow up and mature so that we can produce sons as well.

Ephesians 4:14-16 (The Message) No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.

Homework Question #2: Why is it important to grow up in God?

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Abraham buys land

Genesis 23 is a very interesting chapter. The first two verses deal with Sarah's death and Abraham's mourning. The next eighteen verses deal with Abraham purchasing a piece of land for a burial place for Sarah.

Think about that for a moment. If you were the one writing about the death of such a key person as Sarah, would you only devote two verses to it and then go into a whole lot of detail about a business transaction? I have to confess; I would probably write 18 verses about Sarah's death and Abraham mourning her and then just append two verses to say that Abraham bought a field and a cave for a burial plot from the Hittites.

Because so much of the text is allocated to the purchase of this burial place, it is worth more than a second look. This is what we find:

1. The main reason why so much text is devoted to this is because it is extremely significant. This is the first piece of the Promised Land that legally belongs to Abraham and his descendants. It was the start of the fulfillment of one of God's promises to Abraham: that this land would belong to him.
2. Abraham did not ask for property in the center of their land. He asked for a piece of land "at the end of the field", i.e., on the outskirts. He did not want to infringe on what they owned. At the same time, however, he was establishing another boundary marker for the land that his descendants would possess one day.
3. According to Robert Altar's Genesis commentary, the amount of money that Abraham paid for the land was exorbitantly high. In fact, Altar calls it "a king's ransom". Yet, Abraham did not argue about the price. He simply paid it in full. Abraham only wanted the cave but Ephron insisted that he buy the field as well, probably in an attempt to help to justify the extremely high price.
4. Notice that this transaction was finalized at the gate of the city where all judgments and other legal matters were dealt with.

Once the deal was complete, Abraham buried Sarah in the cave.

Homework Question #3: Why do you think that Abraham didn't argue about the high price of the land?

After this, Abraham sent out his servant to find a bride for Isaac. I encourage you to read about this in Genesis 24 for your own reference because we won't be covering it any further in this study. The servant came back with Rebekah who became the mother of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Abraham remarried and had more children but Isaac was his sole heir. When Jacob and Esau were fifteen years old Abraham died at 175. Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave with Sarah.