

SHARLA GOETTL



COVENANT POWER

TRANSFORM FEAR INTO FAITH
THROUGH THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST

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Chapter 1

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Jacob

To be known as Israel or “Let God Prevail”

Along the River Jabbok **See Genesis 27–32**

I HAVE OFTEN GAZED UPON THE INNUMERABLE STARS SHINING ABOVE MY HEAD. God has prophesied that those stars are mine—every single one of them. Those stars in their glory represent my glorious future children. Ever since, those stars have been as overwhelming to me as they have been beautiful to behold. My whole life, their brightness has entreated me, goaded me, even intimidated me. I have wanted to touch them, but also feared that I might cause their fall.

God has spoken. One day, I will know them and love them. I will speak counsel, and they will hear me. They will sing praises to God, and I will hear them. God has promised that I will be a patriarch of His covenantal family, which will expand to an uncountable number. Each member of my posterity will hold the potential for glory—even to exceed the stars.

But how is this to be done and by what power? This question has often occupied my thoughts and filled my prayers. If I can't even imagine how it is to be done, then how can *I* be the means whereby it's fulfilled?

My father, Isaac of Moriah, has been sanctified by our God since he was a young man (see Genesis 22). God's touch of salvation has made him wise, stalwart, and kind. He is a fitting symbol of God's sacrificial Lamb. Isaac brought me before the mantle of priesthood power—at the feet of my patriarchal grandfather Abraham—and confirmed all the promises and blessings of which I was taught.

My father and grandfather should have been nothing more than two obscure men of the dusty fields. Caring for livestock should have been their life's purpose. But because of their covenants with God, they have seen visions of the Christ, heard angels, and felt the undeniable burning of the Holy Ghost. They have achieved so much but still do not have all they dream of.

Each has only one covenantal son to share their divine inheritance. How then are their impossibly grand prophesies to be fulfilled? They will be fulfilled with posterity to number the stars, access to redemption across generations, fortune beyond our understanding, fame that will spread across the whole world, and authorization to access the Almighty's priesthood power unto godly exaltation.

Isaac and Abraham waited with such hopeful patience for the Lord's plan. I have asked them how they have the stamina to do so, but I have never understood the optimism in their answers. Why? How? Their answers never satisfied me because I couldn't understand the weight and strength of God's power. I didn't possess enough context to see how far God's power could reach. I did not yet know enough to be reassured.

But now I do. Now I know for myself what my ancestors have known for a long time. It's as if I once held pebbles of knowledge, but now I stand on a mountain of truth. Tonight's experience with the Lord has given me a higher perspective, from which I can now see more clearly into His plan. I now stand on firmer ground, which grants me a clearer understanding of the work God has called me to.

As I look at the stars now, with God's vision my own, I am seeing them anew for the first time.

I wish to tell you my story. I need you to see how God has led my path of salvation from my early days, preparing me for a work I must accomplish.

It started many, many years ago. As a child, hearing the teachings of my forebearers always filled me with wonder and peace. God was good. God was intelligence. God was there for me. But my twin brother Esau felt quite differently. We learned the same lessons and heard the same stories, but while I saw strength, he saw weakness.

God had taught my grandfather the mysteries of heaven, but Esau considered Abraham's studies to be a distraction from what was real. God had saved my father on the sacrificial altar, but Esau saw Isaac's willingness to submit as a vulnerability. To be at the mercy of anyone or anything was intolerable to Esau. He thought that depending on another, even God, diminished him. Any outcome was better than showing weakness or being trapped by another's expectations.

Esau grew to be brawny and bold but obsessively focused on avoiding a state of vulnerability. He spent his time on whatever would make him stronger, more skilled, or more influential. He carelessly traded his birthright to me to prove he didn't really need it—his future was in his own hands. He married women of Canaan to prove that no limitation applied to him—he could marry whoever he wanted.

However, there were times when his arrogance faltered, and his true feelings came to the surface. Esau could not hide his disappointment when our

father unknowingly conferred the priesthood upon me instead of him. The momentary sign of inferiority made him intensely angry. His anger was focused on me, not because he wanted the responsibility of the priesthood, but because I made him appear weak, for he had lost something of immense value. My blessing sparked a feeling of shame in my brother. Deep in his heart, he knew the inheritance was bestowed correctly and that he had not lived worthy of his birthright. If I were eliminated, he thought his shame could die with me, and the inheritance would once again be his.

The twin brother of my birth called for my death. I had to run away at the urgent pleading of my parents. But I did not deny God in my distress. I could not deny that I hoped for Him and His promises.

So instead, I ran from my home, my family, and my land. My faith in God's promises was still intact. I headed toward the distant home of my uncle Laban with the hope that at some future time, it would be safe enough to return.

Unfortunately, my relief was only temporary. Walking to Haran from Beersheba was its own kind of death sentence. Four hundred fifty miles across harsh, unfamiliar wilderness included months of exposure and deprivation for an unprepared, lone man. I wasn't young, but I had never been this exposed before. I was so afraid of this new vulnerability—destitute for the first time, forced to beg for protection, stripped of all control over my life. Did Adam feel this way walking away from the Garden of Eden? At least he wasn't alone.

Not more than a few days' journey north toward Haran, I lay down to sleep with nothing but a stone as my pillow. That evening, God visited me in a vivid dream (see Genesis 28:10–22).

Above me in the air, the dark azure skies opened to reveal a world otherwise unseen but as real as the one in which I live. Stretching from the ground to the star-dazzling heavens appeared a ladder—or stairway—of several steps. Sturdy, unwavering, and glowing as an everlasting flame, these steps were reliable and constant. Upon them moved angels—men and women of God. With evident purity and power, these sentinels moved freely up and down the steps.

My mind perceived more than my eyes could see. I could sense their power as subjects of God. I could feel their purpose and satisfaction. This vision sparked many new questions, but I also recognized with clarity that I lacked what they had. They had protection that would never be taken from

them. They had the capability to control their outcome. I began to realize that becoming like them may be part of how I fulfill my duty so God's grand promises could come true.

The stairs started right where I was. It wouldn't take more than a few strides before reaching the first step. As I gazed upward along the solid steps, I realized they led to where I wanted to be. I wanted to be among those stars—among my future-glorified, worldwide family. Suddenly, I understood the magnificent lesson that the Messiah was so beautifully illustrating for me—that the covenant path was available, accessible, and within my capacity to climb. I only needed to take one step at a time. His steps of salvation stretched so much further than I had imagined they could.

Understanding that God had endowed me with a sacred gift, I dedicated the place in which I had camped and seen this vision. Calling the place Bethel, or "the house of God," I built and anointed an altar in this sacred space to mark the lifelong promise I made to Him. If He returned me safely back to my home, I would serve Him all my days.

Having survived my long journey, I first laid eyes on my future wife several weeks later on the outskirts of Haran. I still hold pieces of memory from that day. Her long auburn hair was the finest thing I had seen in months. It shone in the setting sunlight as she walked along the dirt road. She held a blue scarf but dropped it, then snatched it up just before her sheep could step on it. I remember watching her laugh at herself before she even noticed I was there.

She was so beautiful to my dreary eyes. There was a light emanating from her that I had never perceived in any other woman. It was only by the hand of God that the future keeper of my heart—my dear Rachel— would have come to the same well as I.

The years that followed flew by with hard work and quick progress. God never failed in His promises to me, always turning a difficult situation to my advantage.

When my father-in-law thought of cheating me into marrying his eldest daughter, Leah, little did he know how much I would need her. May God be praised for knowing what I needed even more than I did myself. As the blessed matron of our large family, Leah has given me wise counsel and steadfast partnership that has been my solace through many days.

Though I have withstood many trials, my hardships have been well borne. My wealth and family have grown despite circumstances that would have easily hindered other men, thanks to the strength the Lord has given me. I am now the father of a great many sons and daughters, with four wives who depend on me and care for me.

It was one year ago that a burning in my heart could no longer be dismissed. God was directing me to return home, back to Beersheba. Rachel finally had a child of her own, our dear little one, Joseph. With her emotional weight graciously lifted at last, the time to leave her home and return to my own finally felt right.

I have no reason to believe Esau's anger has calmed over the years. What's more, he has grown even more influential over time. In the twenty years since my escape from Beersheba, God has kept His promises to Esau as well (see Genesis 27:39–41). He has become a man of great reputation and authority. While I have built up a great multitude of sheep and children, he has built up an army of men. At his command, my family could be slaughtered, my household enslaved, and my flocks stolen. My entire life would become forfeit.

With each southward mile, my dread would not be calmed. I sent ahead scouts who reported back all I had feared. Esau approached with no less than 400 men. I was racked with guilt for putting my family in such danger and desperately considered every option.

Seven days ago, I chose a wooded spot along the banks of the River Jabbok to camp, water the herds, and consider my next move. I arranged for large waves of gifts to be sent ahead in Esau's name. Perhaps 600 animals would be enough to encumber his forces.

In truth, I feel no pity at the loss of my herds. It felt right to give them to him. After all, I did indeed desire his birthright for myself, and I treasure it still today. And despite all the circumstances, I knew in my heart it would hurt him. If I can in any way make amends by offering him the bounty God has given me, I hope to do so.

Over the last few days, my wives and children could read the distress across my brow, filling their hearts with fear. It was my responsibility to protect them. I chose to bring them into this danger, far from the comfortable tents and fires of Haran. How am I any different from Abraham, who hiked up a mountain intent on sacrificing his one son? I have knowingly placed all eleven of my sons in mortal danger, along with the whole of my household!

Yesterday, I placed my family far from me on the other side of the river, pitifully hoping that perhaps it would act as a barrier if Esau attacked in the night. With all possible preparations complete, I waited alone as the camp across the water settled down to sleep. The firelight of the sentries reflected off the water. The breeze was crisp and cool. I strained to hear if it brought the sound of galloping horses, but the night was silent and all was calm.

The sky darkened, and the stars began to shine above my head once more. The stars were completely unconcerned that the dangerous dawn could bring my complete and utter destruction. As I lay on my back in the cold grass, sleep was far from me. I stared at those stars that felt so far away. Were they disappointed that I found myself in such a precarious situation? Pressure mounted in my heart, and I could barely stand looking at them any longer. I squeezed my eyes shut and desperately pleaded for God's help (see Genesis 32:24–32).

For hours, my mind tumbled from one fear to the next as they multiplied at an overwhelming pace. I was praying to God so long that I felt as though I could envision Him standing before me, listening to my concerns. Yet I allowed no relief to enter my heart. I wanted an explanation more than I wanted peace. My emotions began coming forcefully, even chaotically, shifting quickly between dread, frustration, and logic. Anxious energy filled my limbs, and I stood to pace in agitation. Every heaven-sent plea felt like a grasp at thin air. Eventually, my fear of Esau warped into resentment toward God. Reaching a breaking point, I even threw a blow at the night sky, but it didn't end in empty space. I hit what felt like ... flesh.

What had just happened? Was I awake or dreaming?

But there he was, standing directly in front of me. Just what I wanted and just what I needed—a godly man willing to fight it out. Who was this stranger in the dark? I looked at him, but I felt he could look *into* me. He knew how vulnerable I was, and I knew he could do something about it. Could I make him help me?

He squared his shoulders and lowered his head, as if he had heard my thoughts. Irrationally, full of anger and desperation, the fight within me broke its bounds, and I full-on charged the man. He was ready. He countered with a satisfying force to fairly match the fire within me.

All night we thrashed; all night I wrestled with this unknown man of flesh and bone. If I could just hold on to him, he would have to help me. If I could

pin him down, he would have to answer my questions. My pride would not allow me to stop. Perhaps I'm more like Esau than I thought. I was fighting to know if I held the power to rescue my family. I needed to know if this man could be beaten.

With one attack after another, I exhausted my immediate worries. As the night dragged on, I dug deeper, tapping into what felt like an unending supply of spiritual troubles and doubts, fueling my fire to physically fight back. I didn't know who he was yet, but the fight in my heart was with God. In my mind, I yelled question after question toward God:

"I can't save them by myself! I can't even protect my children!"

"I don't know what's coming. I don't know what I'm supposed to do!"

"Will you leave me? Or will you fight this fight for me?"

"I'm unprotected in an open plain. Where is the protection I was promised?"

"How can you let me utterly fail like this?"

"Why won't you answer me?"

"Why have you chosen me?"

"Haven't I done what you wanted? Haven't I tried?"

"What more do you want from me? I'm not good enough to do what you want."

"How can I possibly lead the children of men to the Messiah? Why is this my responsibility?"

"I want to be with you. I've done what you asked. But now I'm terrified!"

"Why have you done this to me? Why have you brought me here?"

I needed to fight, and he knew it. I needed a wrestle of the heart, mind, and body. He bore all I could throw at him and let it keep coming. Every time I punched out my fears, he swerved deftly. Every time I attempted to take him down, I faltered against an unmovable weight. Every time I had him trapped, he knew the perfect escape.

When he hit me, his blows resonated deeply, bringing clarity and revelation. When he held back my arms, I knew there was nothing stronger in the world. When he pinned me down, I struggled hard, but he released me only at his choosing. He never once faltered. I found only relentless superiority.

When he flipped me over his back or threw me to the ground, I glimpsed the stars again and again. I'd close my eyes and drag myself up, just to be flipped again moments later.

“Those are your stars,” he kept saying in my mind. “I know what I am doing!”

By the time the sun began to rise, my body was bruised and broken, but my mind was clear and active. I realized I no longer needed to be the savior of my family—not my family now, and not the family I was destined to care for. God could save us. God *would* save us! I just had to trust Him. I just had to follow Him.

Proving that he was stronger than me, the man gently touched my hip with one finger. My pelvis broke immediately. I fell to the ground in utter shock and indescribable pain! Unable to lift my own body, I now knew he had power over me and all heaven and earth.

But just as quickly, he healed me. The searing pain was momentary, the healing comfort tangible. Miraculously, he was the source of this healing. But how could this be done? Which is easier, to break a bone or to heal one? (see Matthew 9:1–8)

With my own eyes, I saw he was real. With my own body, I learned of his superior strength and endurance. With my own pain, I felt the contrast of his healing power. His firm resolve and solid strength calmed my questions. I now trusted that he was powerful enough for me.

Exhausted in the early dawn, my body dripping with sweat and dew, I knelt in the dirt and honored the victor.

He asked me to declare my name, which I did willingly.

Then he declared a new name upon me—Israel, which means “let God prevail.”¹

I wondered why he gifted me with a name of power when I had lost the wrestle? But God’s wisdom came into my mind. The name was to testify to the *true* source of my power.

This is a name I will repeat for the rest of my life, reminding me of the skill I truly need to develop. Whenever a loved one calls out to me for help, this name will guide them. Whenever future generations pray for home, this name will comfort them. Whenever a covenantal son or daughter needs added strength, this name will remind them to Whom they belong.

Israel, Israel, Israel.

I relented to this man who had fought me throughout the night, distilling comfort and wisdom in unexpected ways. He had certainly prevailed over me.

But who was this man? Could Jehovah Himself be here with me in the flesh? Or could this heavenly fighter instead be Enoch of old or the great Melchizedek, translated beings sent to me by God's grace?

"Tell me, I pray thee, thy name," I asked.

"Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?" He replied. "Do you not know who I am?"

Then, before my eyes, I saw the Man for who He was—the only One who could grant me a covenant of power. This stranger of my troubled night shone with a majesty that made the coming sun look plain and small. Before me stood Elohim, Father of all Heaven, come so far down to answer my questions and instill confidence within my heart.

I saw Him face-to-face.

I embraced the Father of Adam, Enoch, and Noah, even the God of Abraham and Isaac. I released my doubts into those outstretched arms and confidently embraced my new identity to let God prevail forever in my life. I tearfully worshipped Him for helping me overcome the fears of my present battles and my future tasks. I solemnly dedicated my full loyalty to Him.

Once again alone, lying exhausted in the grass, my arms and hands could still feel the warm afterglow of that embrace. My body was spent, and my mind was flooded with insights from my new perspective.

The morning finally broke, and the dawn fully arrived. The sun threw a blanket of warm light over my stars and painted the sky with vivid color. I listened to the birds sing their worshipful songs along the riverbank. The water flowed—ceaseless and steady—the way God's will continued to flow onward. A breeze cooled my heated skin as it filled my lungs with new life.

I will see my brother today. The thought no longer makes me afraid. Esau has no power to change what God wishes to take place. He has laid the steps of my covenant promises before me. I will climb every step of the ladder, for I know God will always prevail.²

ENDOWED WITH PARTNERSHIP

Creating an endowed partnership with God in His holy temple is a necessary step toward soul-saving.

Jacob would agree. As he yielded to God, the highest of privileges were sealed upon him: all the blessings promised to his fathers and the ability to enjoy God's presence. Essentially, God's endowment was sealed upon him. As Genesis 32:28–30 states, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. ... And [God] blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel [meaning the face of God]: for I have seen God face-to-face, and my life is preserved."

Your endowment will also bring *you* these incredible benefits. Your endowment can create a deep sense of confidence. But do you understand why this is true? Do you know what promises you make in the temple and what promises are made to you in return? As you look for covenant principles throughout the scriptures, you will see God showing you examples of how revealed covenant ordinances can benefit your life.

The words "fear not" and "glad tidings" take on deeper significance during the endowment because Christ addresses our mortal fears with each covenant, layer by layer, while also promising us our deepest desires one by one. Through consistent righteousness and divine decree, you do not need to be afraid, nor do you need to doubt your ultimate success. This was Heavenly Father's message to Jacob as they wrestled that night. This is the empowering truth found in temples today.

Jacob was very afraid that night. He was afraid of failure in the face of meeting Esau, but he was also afraid of not fulfilling his purpose. We all have fears and doubts about reaching our fullest potential. Jacob's covenantal interactions with God made him confident and hopeful—but they also made him capable. God's covenants gave him the reassurance he needed to know his fears could not hinder his promised successes.

Covenants are how you overcome all that makes you afraid. They are also how you get what you want because God is teaching you His strategies for success. Covenants can brace you when you feel vulnerable and can provide a solid foundation for our growth. Each covenant has a purpose. They interlock

seamlessly to create the only sure and safe foundation Christ has promised you (Jacob 4:15–16). In the following chapters, I will explain how each covenant serves to build you up.

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