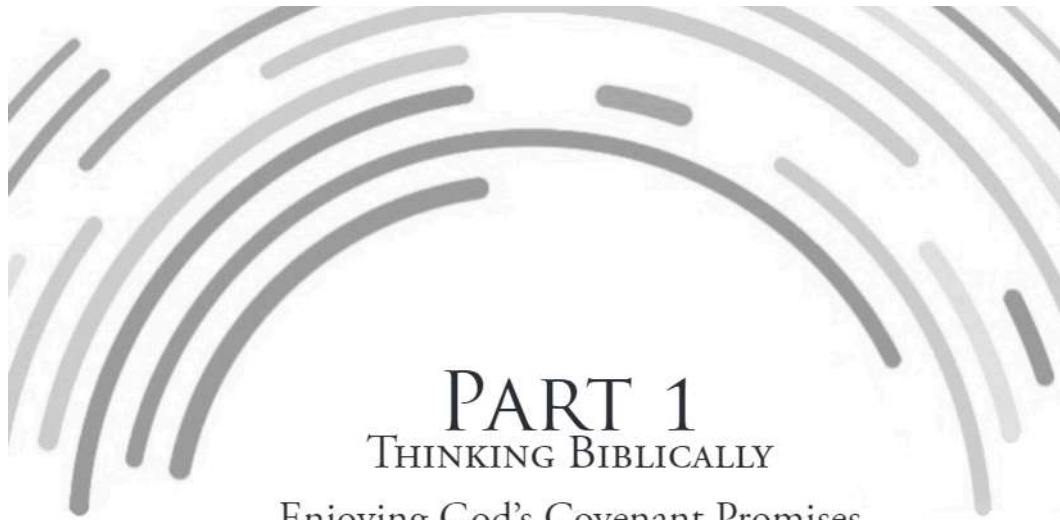


Daughters
OF THE COVENANT
Enjoying, Embodying, and Entrusting
God's Promises

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PART 1

THINKING BIBLICALLY

Enjoying God's Covenant Promises

And this is the promise that He made to us—eternal life.
1 John 2:25

*I*magine . . . A father writes his beloved daughter telling her of his lavish promises and provisions for her, but she never opens his letter. She never lives in the joyful reality of his promises and provisions.

A funny thing about a promise—we only enjoy it if we know about it.

In this section we will consider how to think biblically about three foundational concepts that should shape our relationships and discipleship.

1. God's Covenant Promise
2. God's Creation Design
3. Covenant Life

As you read these chapters, let the covenantal concepts and language wash over you. Prayerfully consider how knowing and enjoying Him fills you with more of Him. Let your imagination soar as you reflect on the implications and applications of His covenant promise and His creation design of you as a woman.

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

John 10:10b



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Covenant

He sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever. Holy and awesome is His name!

Psalm 111:9

About forty years ago we (Barbara and Susan) began learning a covenantal perspective of Scripture. It was as if God's Word was unlocked. As we saw Jesus in all of Scripture, we saw the redemption story in all its glory. Over time, as God's Word worked its way deep into our hearts and coursed through our veins, we began to explore and rejoice in what it means to glorify and enjoy God. His Word changed how we thought about the world and our lives. It informed and influenced every role and relationship. It changed our attitudes, ambitions, and actions. It shaped us, and now in our old age, it sustains us. We are living in the blessed assurance of God's covenant promise that He is with us and will never leave us. The promise of His presence is our doxology even as I (Susan) buried my husband, and I (Barbara) am being cared for by my husband. So, as you read this chapter, please know we wish we were sitting with you and could tell you, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it" (Ps. 139:6). We are writing about things that fill us with wonder, things too wonderful for us to understand without the Holy Spirit teaching and transforming us, so we encourage you to pause and pray, then sing, "Let us

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love and sing and wonder, let us praise the Savior's name!"¹

Buckle up. We're going to fly high and see an overview of God's covenant. We begin here because until we see God's covenant love for His chosen people and are in a posture of worship and wonder at the grace and beauty of this relationship, we will resist His female design. We will try to create ourselves in our own image. But when we see gender distinctiveness in the context of His redemptive plan and purpose, we will bow with gratitude for our inheritance as daughters of the covenant.

God said: "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness . . . So, God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Gen. 1:26-27). But how would the God of Glory relate to His male and female creatures?

The Westminster Confession of Faith answers this question:

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.²

We could never build a tower high enough or a bridge long enough to reach God. He had to come to us. Covenant is the way God comes near to be with and to redeem His people, so it gives us a redemptive, historical perspective of the Bible.

- Covenant is a sovereignly initiated and sustained promise, and thus, it is eternally secure and gives us assurance of our place and purpose in redemptive history, including our creation design and calling as women.
- Covenant is relational. The Lord God is a personal God who designed us for His glory and redeems us to live in relationship with Him.

¹ John Newton, "Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder," *Trinity Hymnal* (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 1990), 172.

² *Westminster Confession of Faith with Scripture Proofs*, Chap. VII, "Of God's Covenant with Man" (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Discipleship Ministries, 2013), 25.

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- Covenant is familial. From the beginning, God worked through families. He adopts us into His family.
- Covenant is corporate. The family became a nation of God's covenant people.
- Covenant is generational. Throughout Scripture we are commanded to "tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and His might, and the wonders that He has done" (Ps. 78:4).
- Covenant is compassionate. God is a God of compassion, and we are to be a people of compassion.
- Covenant is integrative. It is the thread that holds Scripture together and shows its purpose, continuity, and connections.
- Covenant is the guarantee of our "inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:4-5), so it empowers us to live in the blessed assurance of our standing before God.

These characteristics of the covenant reflect the character of God. May they also be reflected in our lives. (See the Leader's Guide for more on the characteristics of the covenant.)

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COVENANT DEFINED

Covenant defies definition. We think if we define covenant we will understand it, but that is as futile as thinking the definition of *motherhood* will give us an experiential knowledge of that concept. *Covenant* is not just an idea to understand; it is a relationship that transforms. Perhaps this is why definitions become doxologies.

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Dr. O. Palmer Robertson writes,

A covenant may be defined as a bond in blood sovereignly administered. Life and death are at stake in the divine covenants. God has bound Himself to humans and them to Himself. Life in your soul, blessing in your family, prosperity in your work and the course of the world—all these matters hinge on the provisions of God's covenants. Your personal peace (in the Hebrews' sense of "total blessedness") will derive only from your walking and believing in the ways of His covenants.³

Biblical covenants are

- a bond—a binding agreement.
- a bond in blood—if one party breaks the covenant, the penalty is death.
- sovereignly initiated—God comes to us.
- sovereignly administered—God sets the terms.

The Bible is organized around three covenants which show the framework and continuity of the Bible. This covenant

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structure shows that the Bible is one story. This covenantal perspective is essential for a cohesive, comprehensive biblical world-and-life view.

1. THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION

No architect builds a skyscraper without a precise purpose and plan for every detail of the building. Neither did the Architect of the universe speak the world into existence without a plan and purpose. Ephesians 1 gives a glimpse into eternity past. It is a doxology praising the Triune God's plan and purpose.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before

³O. Palmer Robertson, *Covenants: God's Way with His People* (Suwanee, GA.: Great Commission Publications, 1993), 11.

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the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption . . . through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved (vv. 3-6).

Sisters, if we had nothing else, this is enough to cause us to worship with wonder. Read it again and thank the Father for what His sovereign love motivated Him to plan and do for you before He made you—even before He created the world. And remember, He knew what our adoption would cost Him—the death of His Son.

In Him [His beloved Son] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose. . . . In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory (vv. 7-9, 11-12).

Pause and praise Jesus for His redeeming work on your behalf.

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory (vv. 13-14).

Ponder the work of the Holy Spirit who applies and secures what the Father purposed and the Son accomplished.

The purpose of this redemption plan was to “praise His glorious grace” (vv. 6, 12, 14)—not because He needs our praise but because nothing could display the brilliance of His grace as lavishly as the redemption of fallen sinners who deserved His wrath but who are chosen to live for His glory. And nothing could give us more significance than for our chief end to be “to

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glorify and enjoy Him forever.”⁴

2. THE COVENANT OF WORKS

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden . . . The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”
(Gen. 2:7-8a, 15-17).

The Westminster Confession of Faith explains: “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.”⁵

This covenant was sovereignly initiated; God set the terms. God did not say, “Obey, and I will love you.” God already loved him since before creation. This is how Adam could continue living in the blessedness of that love. It was a bond in blood: obey and live; disobey and die. And there was no provision if he disobeyed, which he did. “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). But this cosmic treason did not stop God from keeping His covenant of redemption.

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and My covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you (Isa. 54:10).

3. THE COVENANT OF GRACE

The pre-creation covenant of redemption between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bound God to an act of unswerving

⁴ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs*, Q. 1 (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Discipleship Ministries, 2010), 3.

⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. VII, 26.

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covenant loyalty. He came near. The man and woman heard Him speak words of death to the serpent, but a promise of life for them.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God . . . But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" . . . The LORD God said to the serpent, . . . "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" (Gen. 3:8-9, 14a, 15).

This is a covenant of grace because Adam deserved death but received life. This is a binding agreement. It is sovereignly initiated. It is a bond in blood. Provision is made for their disobedience: The Seed of the woman will shed His blood.

These three covenants outline the gospel:

1. The Covenant of Redemption: revealing God's sovereign, electing love
2. The Covenant of Works: revealing our sin and guilt
3. The Covenant of Grace: revealing God's Provision.

God still demands perfect obedience. We are still saved by works, but it is the work of Christ who perfectly obeyed and gave His life as payment for our disobedience.

Our hope is in the triune God's relentless commitment to keep His covenant promise to those He chose to adopt as His sons and daughters.

THE COVENANT PROMISE

Look again at the covenant promise in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (NIV).

God's "I will" shows His sovereign initiative in our redemption. We do not seek Him; He seeks us. His "I will" promise to be with us is a thread woven from Genesis to Revelation.

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“I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Gen. 17:7).

“I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God . . .” (Ex. 6:7a).

“I will make My dwelling among you. . . . And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be My people” (Lev. 26:11-12).

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:33; see also Heb. 8:10).

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel” (which means, God with us) (Matt. 1:23; see also Isa. 7:14b).

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:27-28).

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:1-3).

The covenant thread is historical. It runs from eternity past when the Father chose us in Christ, and it goes to eternity future when all of His children will be gathered to Him.

The covenant thread is personal. At a time and place in

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history it penetrates the heart of each of God's chosen ones when His Holy Spirit replaces our heart of stone with a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26) that is able to respond to Jesus in repentance and faith.

The covenant thread is local. Our local church is the place where we are "united to one another in love [and] have communion in each other's gifts and graces . . . [and] are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual service as tend to [our] mutual edification."⁶

The covenant thread is global. God's Church is made up of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Covenant is not just a theological concept; it is thoroughly practical. God binds Himself to us, and that bond binds us to one another. The covenant is a way of life that flows out of a promise of life. Maybe this is why God tells us about the covenant through stories.

GOD'S "I WILL" SHOWS HIS SOVEREIGN INITIATIVE IN OUR REDEMPTION. WE DO NOT SEEK HIM; HE SEEKS US.

THE COVENANT STORY UNFOLDS

The story that began in eternity past unfolds in Genesis. Genesis 12 focuses on Abram, a man who was not seeking God. God initiated the relationship with him and promised that the Savior would come from his family. Abram and his wife were childless. Years passed . . . many years passed. They were too old to have children. Then one day God spoke to Abram again: "Fear not, Abram. I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (Gen. 15:1).

Abram responded, "O Lord GOD what will you give me, for I continue childless . . . You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir" (vv. 2-3).

⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. XXVI, "Of the Communion of Saints," 114-115.

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God took Abram outside and told him to look at the heavens and count the stars. Then God said, “So shall your offspring be” (v. 5b).

The drama of the moment is heightened by the simplicity of the next line: “And he believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness” (v. 6). Then Abram asked the question we all ask at some point. “O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” (v. 8).

The promise of God is so big we cannot wrap our finite minds around it. We, like Abram, must bow in belief. But also, like Abram, there are times we face a crisis and ask, “How can I know the promise is real?”

God graciously answered Abram with a vivid illustration. God told him to bring a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove, and a young pigeon, to cut them in half and arrange the halves opposite each other. (When I [Susan] teach this to children, I ask two of them to stand back-to-back and pretend they are a heifer. The next two are a goat. Then I “cut” them in half. They lie on the floor with a path between them, and I tell them what happened.)

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” . . . When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land. . . .” (vv. 12-14, 17-18).

This ritual was common in the culture of Abram’s day, with one striking difference. When two people made a covenant, they both walked between the pieces, signifying their promise to keep the terms of the covenant or die. But Abram was asleep. God passed through the pieces alone. We can know we will gain

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possession of the promise because it does not depend on us; it all depends on Him. At Golgotha “there was darkness over all the land . . . Jesus cried out, . . . ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matt. 27:45-46). When Jesus paid the penalty for our sin, He was cut apart, separated from God, so we never will be. How can we know the promise is real? We look at the cross.

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God’s promise to Abram—later named Abraham—is His promise to us: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29).

When the dreadful darkness came, God told Abraham his family would be enslaved in a foreign land for four hundred years, but then God would deliver them out of slavery. That is exactly what happened.

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Abraham’s great-grandson, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his brothers and eventually became the leader second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. Through a series of providential circumstances, his brothers came to buy food. When they realized who he was, they were terrified, but Joseph said, “Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5). Thus, Jacob and all his family went to Egypt.

Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:6-8).

The king was worried about this population explosion and devised a wicked plan:

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Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live" (vv. 15-16).

The Israelites faced annihilation. The covenant thread would be broken. Four hundred years is a long time. Did anyone remember the obscure promise to Abraham?

But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live (v. 17).

What were Shiphrah and Puah thinking? Why would they recklessly defy Pharaoh's command? They were thinking biblically and living covenantally. They knew and believed the promise given to Abraham. Their trust in this promise overflowed with radical obedience. They glorified God by living for the common good and for future generations.

Consider the outcome: "So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, He gave them families" (Ex. 1:20-21).

This is stunning—some women feared God; they trusted the promise, and God "dealt well" with them, and the people grew strong in a time of suffering. Their obedience must have energized other Israelite women. A culture of womanhood emerged and flourished. Jochebed devised a bold plan to save her baby. Her young daughter, Miriam, followed the lead of these pro-life heroines. When the princess found Jochebed's baby floating in the basket, big sister Miriam courageously offered to find a nurse, and the princess agreed. Jochebed was hired on the spot when the princess said, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages" (Ex. 2:9).

This community not only saved the babies, apparently, they disciplined them. Moses only had a few years in the home of his parents, and then he grew up in the courts of Pharaoh, but as an

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adult, he chose to live under the promise of the covenant rather than the power of Pharaoh. Years later, God called him to return to Egypt and deliver his people out of bondage. At Mount Sinai, God adopted them as a holy nation. He told Moses to tell the people:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:4-6).

Here we see the picture of the Church emerging. Peter echoed this language when he wrote,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

The word *covenant* is mentioned almost three hundred times in the Bible; obviously it is a major theme. The various covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David are a progressive revelation of the covenant of grace. Each reveals another truth while history steadily moved toward the grand and glorious time when “the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Jesus fulfilled every Old Testament type and image. All those visible illustrations are consummated in Him. When He shouted from the cross, “It is finished!” it was a cry of victory. Every covenant requirement had been met, not by the covenant-breakers but by the spotless Lamb who is our Substitute. He paid the redemption price for those the Father chose before the creation of the world, and on the basis of His righteousness,

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IT'S NO WONDER THIS IS CALLED
A NEW COVENANT. IT'S NOT
NEW BECAUSE IT'S DIFFERENT.
IT'S NEW BECAUSE IT'S THE
FULL, COMPLETE, EFFECTUAL
EXPRESSION OF ALL THAT
WAS WHISPERED IN THE OLD
COVENANT.

we are declared holy and
blameless.

When we look at the
cross, we see the Seed who
was promised, the Ark who
saves from judgment, the
Lamb who took Isaac's place,
the Law that was kept, and
the King who rules and
reigns in the hearts of His

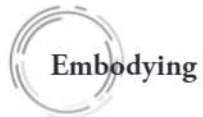
people because He did not remain in the tomb. He rose in
victory from the grave and ascended in triumph to the throne.

It's no wonder this is called a new covenant. It's not new
because it's different. It's new because it's the full, complete,
effectual expression of all that was whispered in the old
covenant.

So dear sisters, let's pray . . .

*Father, according to the riches of Your glory, strengthen us
with power through Your Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ
may dwell in our hearts through faith—that we, being rooted
and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all
the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we
may be filled with all the fullness of You. Amen (Eph. 3:16-19,
personalized).*

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3. What difference does this promise make when you face a crisis?

4. What characteristics of the covenant do you see embodied in the Hebrew midwives, Jochebed, and Miriam?

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Entrusting

5. What difference does it make if our chief end in every relationship, circumstance, and life-season is to glorify and enjoy God?