

GENESIS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Genesis chapter 17 as we continue our study through the Word of God. In our last study we saw God promise Abram a son and he waited upon God, and he waited upon God and he waited upon God and nothing was happening and they were no longer spring chickens! His wife, Sarai was still barren. Thus, God must need some help here so Plan B was put into effect.

Plan B was nothing more than getting a surrogate mother and this was a common practice back then. If your wife was barren then you could take your maidservant and have a child by her and that child would be the first born in the family, he would be the heir! Thus, Sarai tells Abram to take Hagar and have a child by her and Abram, wanting to obey his wife, does just that and Hagar conceives! And so, at the age of 86 Abram had a son through Hagar and his name was Ishmael. Interestingly enough, his name means, “God hears” and thus, it was a constant reminder that God does hear our prayers and He will fulfill those promises He has made to us in His time!

As we are going to see tonight, God is not going to recognize Ishmael as the son of promise, as the son of Abram. You see, he was the result of the works of the flesh and not a son of faith. That is an important lesson for Abram and for us to learn. Now, as we move into Genesis chapter 17 tonight, 13 years have passed by since Ishmael was born and once again God will speak to Abram. With that said, let’s begin reading in Genesis chapter 17, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word!

GENESIS 17**VERSES 1-2**

1. Think about this for a minute. The last time God spoke directly to Abram was in Genesis chapter 15, some 24 years have now passed by! Why did God wait so long? First of all I believe Abram had a normal fellowship with God but there was not that direct revelation to him. Secondly, God made a promise to Abram and now Abram had to wait. God was going to stretch his faith and He will help Abram to see through the eyes of faith and not the flesh! You see, our faith grows not only as we hear God's Word but also then as we apply it to our lives or as we walk by faith and that is what we are seeing here.

2. How about you, when was the last time God spoke directly to you? I know, you talk to some people and God is always talking to them, even telling them what color socks to wear. What I have found with many of these people is this, when people are always saying that God spoke to them, direct revelation, they are usually wrong. You can't believe the number of times people have come up to me telling me that God told them this or that and I know He didn't because it was not just foolishness, but it was not Scriptural! And it can be discouraging when you talk with them because you haven't heard a direct revelation from God in years. Did you begin to wonder if God forgot about you? Let me tell you this, He didn't! Continue in fellowship with Him as Abram did and God will speak to you through His Word by His Spirit and yes, there will be those times when God will speak to you directly, as He did with Abram here.

3. Abram is ninety-nine years old at this point, Sarai is eighty-nine years old and as the Lord speaks to him he says, **“I am Almighty God.”** Genesis 17:1. The Hebrew words are EL SHADDAY, (shad-dah’ee) and the idea here is that Abram may have come to the end of his resources but God is just beginning, He is Almighty God! In fact, the Septuagint translation of this word, **“Almighty”** or the way the Jewish scholars translated it into Greek was with the word PANTOKRATOR, which means, “One who has his hand on everything.” I like that because that is our God, actively involved in our lives. You see, with that perspective you should never be discouraged, you should never doubt God, He is our EL SHADDAY!

4. God also tells Abram to **“walk before Me and be blameless.”** Genesis 17:1. Doesn’t that sound like a works salvation, that Abram had to attain some standard of being good and then he would enter in? Not at all! The Hebrew word for **“blameless”** or **“perfect”** can mean “whole.” In other words, God wants Abram to commit his whole life to Him, not just part of it! Now some might see that as fanatical, so! It is fanatical. You love your Green Bay Packers; you are a fanatic with them. You love your spouse; you should be a fanatic about them. Thus, God wants nothing less from us. He wants all of us! And if you are going to walk with the Lord, don’t take 1 step forward and then 1 step backward, that is not walking. Keep moving forward, walk by faith!

5. Now, do we see this in the New Testament? You bet we do! In Matthew 22:37 Jesus said, “. . . **‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’**” In other words, we are to love God with our entire being, giving ourselves to Him to use as He pleases. If we trust Him we will do that. That is what Paul said in Romans 12:1, “**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service [spiritual worship].**” You see, if you love God you will trust him and thus, it is easy to place yourself as a living sacrifice on His altar to be used by Him! That is where the blessings are found, walking with the Lord and thus, keep yourself in the spot where the blessings flow out, walk by faith!

6. How do I know that this is true? Look again at Genesis 17:1b-2, “. . . **walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.**” I thought God gave the land of Canaan to them, now it almost sounds like a bilateral covenant, that Abram must do something. Well, not exactly. All he must do is walk by faith, and I don’t believe that is a work, it is a trust. Remember what Paul said in Hebrews 11:6, “**But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**” In other words, to be saved you must have faith in God and your walk is the evidence of your faith in Him! I think that is the point that is being made here!

VERSES 3-8

1. As Abram worshiped the Lord, bowed down before Him, God speaks to him regarding the covenant He has given to Abram and his descendents. Now the name “**Abram**” means “father of many,” which must have been a burden for him. You see, he is ninety-nine years old at this time and has only one son through his wife’s maidservant, Hagar. I don’t know about you, but according to my math, one is not many!

And what does God do here? God changes his name from “**Abram**” to “**Abraham**” or from “father of many” to “father of many nations.” Can you imagine him telling his friends and family that God has changed his name to Abraham! The laughter, it seemed so preposterous to be called that and yet, God saw what would come from Abraham and the Lord would make him a father of many nations!

2. Now, as Christians we are called saints, righteous, sons of God, a royal priesthood, perfect and-so-on. Folks, I know you and you know me and through a human perspective – Saint Steven – that is preposterous! No it is not because of what Jesus has done, and God has worked, and is working and He will finish the work in him and thus, he is Saint Steven, and there is Saint Linda, and Saint Al, and Saint you can put your name in there if you are in Christ as preposterous as it may sound, God will accomplish it!

3. Now this covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendents, how long does it last? God told Abraham that it is an everlasting covenant, and it means just what it says, it is eternal! God not only will bless and multiply the Jewish people, but they will have the Promise Land, the land of Canaan! Now I know some would argue that the Jewish people blew it, they not only forfeited their relationship with God because of their rejection of Jesus, but they also forfeited the land God had given to them.

If that is true then we are in trouble. You see, Paul tells us in Hebrews 13:20-21, **“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”**

If the New Covenant is called an **“everlasting covenant”** and if it does not mean eternal as some say it doesn't in Genesis chapter 17, then we can forfeit it, we can lose it and we are doomed! But the eternal covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendents, and the eternal covenant that He has made with us, is just that, it is eternal, it is everlasting, it is based on the faithfulness of God and not man!

VERSES 9-14

1. Here we see God institute the sign of this covenant he made with Abraham and his descendents – circumcision. And remember that a sign points to something, that is all it can do and that is what circumcision does, as we will see. And keep in mind that this was not a new practice, various people practiced circumcision, but for Abraham and his descendents it would show their faith, it was new for them.

2. Now besides hygienic reasons, circumcision is a cutting away of the flesh and it was symbolic of a separation from the world, it spoke of purity. It is as Moses tells us in Deuteronomy 30:6, **“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”**

3. Over the years the Jews began to look at circumcision as necessary and sufficient for salvation. Instead of looking to the God of the covenant for salvation, they looked to the sign of the covenant, circumcision, for their salvation. Paul, in Galatians picks up on this as he tells us in chapter 5, starting in verse 1, **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”**

Galatians 5:1-6.

Folks, circumcision was an outward sign of an inward reality. Their salvation was based upon their faith in God and the evidence for their salvation was seen in circumcision. In other words, it is a matter of the heart and we see this in Jeremiah 9:26 where we are told, **“Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.”** Again, it was a matter of the heart that is at issue here and not the act of circumcision!

4. How does this relate to us today? Many believe that you must be baptized in order to be saved. Folks, baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality, a relationship with the Lord. Why look to the sign of the covenant, baptism, when we should be looking at the God of the covenant!

Let me give you a few examples to show you what I mean, that baptism doesn't save a person. Remember when Paul and Silas were placed in the Philippian jail for preaching Christ and after a series of events the Philippian jailer asks them, “. . . **‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’**” Acts 16:30. Now listen carefully to how they responded to this question regarding how he can be saved. They said, “. . . **‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’**” Acts 16:31. Did you see that, there is nothing about baptism and if that were needed, Paul would have said it!

Not only that, but in I Corinthians 1:14-17 Paul is dealing with division in the church there in Corinth, carnality, and he says, **“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”**

If baptism were needed for salvation Paul would have had a portable dunk tank and everyone that was saved, he would have baptized, but he didn't. Why didn't Paul do that? Because baptism was not necessary for salvation, that is not what the Lord called him to do. The Lord called him to preach the Gospel message and see people saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! There is nothing about baptism saving a person but plenty that speak against it!

And in Colossians 2:11-12 Paul is dealing with circumcision and he tells us, **“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”** Who is doing the circumcising here? God is and it is done on our hearts, to cut away the hardness and make us more sensitive to the Lord.

Paul makes this point in Romans 2:28-29 as he tells us, **“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”** Just as the outward act of circumcision does not save, neither does the outward act of baptism. Only Jesus saves!

Then should we as Christians even be baptized? I believe we should for the Lord said, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”** Matthew 28:19-20. You see, we should be baptized out of obedience, out of love for the Lord and not for salvation but for the evidence of our salvation. An outward sign of an inward reality!

5. Then what about what Genesis 17:14 says, **“And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”** If circumcision was not necessary, why were they cut off? By reading this it seems that circumcision is necessary and thus, is baptism necessary? No it is not and here is why. By rejecting the sign of the covenant, circumcision, they were rejecting the covenant or the God of the covenant. It is as Jesus said in John 14:15, **“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”** Love equals obedience and I think that is the point here with those that refused to be circumcised!

6. One more point before we move on and that is this. Why did God say that the male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day? Listen carefully to this. In his book, *In Defense Of The Bible's Inspiration*, Bert Thompson tells us:

. . . In humans, blood clotting is dependent upon three factors: (a) platelets; (b) vitamin K; and (c) prothrombin. In 1935, professor H. Dam proposed the name "vitamin K" for the factor that helped prevent hemorrhaging in chicks. We now realize that vitamin K is responsible for the production (by the liver) of prothrombin. If the quantity of vitamin K is deficient, there will be a prothrombin deficiency and hemorrhaging may occur.

Interestingly, it is only on the fifth to seventh days of a newborn's life that vitamin K (produced by the action of bacteria in the intestinal tract) is present in adequate quantities. Vitamin K – coupled with prothrombin – causes blood coagulation, which is important in any surgical procedure. One classic medical text, *Holt Pediatrics*, corroborates the fact that a newborn infant has

. . . peculiar susceptibility to bleeding between the second and fifth days of life. . . Hemorrhages at this time, though often inconsequential, are sometimes extensive; they may produce serious damage to internal organs, especially to the brain, and cause death from shock and exsanguinations (1953, pp. 125-126).

Obviously, then if vitamin K is not produced in sufficient quantities until days five through seven, it would be wise to postpone any surgery until sometime after that. But why did God specify **eight**?

On the eighth day, the amount of prothrombin present actually is **elevated above 100 percent of normal**. In fact, day eight is the only day in the male's life in which this will be the case under normal conditions. If surgery is to be performed, day eight is the perfect day to do it.

S. I McMillen, the renowned medical doctor who wrote *None of These Diseases*, stated concerning this information:

*. . . as we congratulate medical science for this recent finding, we can almost hear the leaves of the Bible rustling. They would like to remind us that four thousand years ago, when God **initiated** circumcision with Abraham, He said "And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised. . . ." Abraham did not pick the eighth day after many centuries of trial-and-error experiments. Neither he nor any of his company from the ancient city of Ur in the Chaldees had ever been circumcised. It was a day picked by the Creator of vitamin K (1963, p. 21, emp. In orig.).*

The medical information employed by Abraham, and confirmed by Moses, was accurate scientifically then, and remains so to this very day. No culture around the Israelites possessed such scientific acumen [insight], which, by the way, was years ahead of its time. How, then, did Abraham and Moses come to know the best time for circumcision, unless, of course, this particular fact was revealed to them by God, and recorded in His Word through inspiration?

- Bert Thompson, Ph.D., In Defense Of The Bible's Inspiration, pp. 54-56

VERSES 15-16

1. Not only did God change Abram's name to Abraham, but now He changes Sarai, which means "lady" or "princess" to Sarah, which is almost the same, there is only a subtle difference. So why did God do it? Because the name "**Sarah**" speaks of a lady or princess of a multitude, there is no restriction. Again, she has been barren for 89 years now and yet God says she was to be "**a mother of nations**"! Hagar, the surrogate mother, was not to be the one, but Sarah herself would have a son!

VERSES 17-18

1. Now some say that Abraham's laugh was one of joy, of elation, and it could be, but I tend to see it differently. As I study this I have two concerns. First of all Abraham doesn't believe that Sarah will have a child because he speaks of Ishmael inheriting the promise. Secondly, the Hebrew word that is used for "**laugh**" here is TSACHAQ, (tsaw-khak') and it can mean to "laugh outright (in merriment or scorn)." So it can be taken either way, depending on the context. That same Hebrew word is used when Sarah laugh's at God's promise of a son in Genesis 18:12 and Genesis 18:13. It could be that Abraham believed that God could do it, but why would he have to when there is Ishmael!

2. At some point though, Abraham does believe in God's promise to give him a son through Sarah, even though she is barren and passed the age of child bearing at this time.

Paul tells us in Romans 4:17-22 of Abraham and his faith, **“(as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed — God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness.’”** You see, Abraham believed God, the promise that God made to him even though from a human perspective, it was impossible. That faith in the Lord was accounted to Abraham as righteousness, not his works, but his faith as it is with us, our faith in Jesus!

3. How about you, do you find it hard to trust God in areas that may seem unbelievable, unconceivable you might say! God can take the impossible and make it very possible, and all we must do is trust in Him and walk by faith. It is as the Lord said in Jeremiah 32:27, “**Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?**” What do you think, is there anything too hard for the Lord? Of course not, He is God and with God all things are possible! That does not mean that God will do all things because He will only do those things that are holy, that are righteous! May we not lose sight of that perspective!

VERSES 19-22

1. God tells Abraham that He will have a son through Sarah and his name will be called Isaac or “laughter.” I see two points that emerge from this name. First of all Abraham will be reminded of how he laughed at the promise of God. You see, Isaac will show Abraham the faithfulness of God’s promise to him, that what He promised He did bring to pass and thus, don’t laugh at what God has promised. Secondly, Isaac will be a reminder of the joy that God had brought into their lives and every time they saw Isaac and called his name, they laughed inside with joy, I’m sure. How about you, are you laughing at what God has promised you, not believing in His promise? Don’t do that, don’t have that laugh of unbelief. You should laugh with joy in your heart at what God has promised you because He will bring it to pass!

2. God also tells Abraham that Ishmael will be blessed but he is not the son by which the covenant promises would come by, he is not the son of promise, Isaac is! And in Galatians chapter 4, Paul picks up on this issue of the Law, represented by Ishmael, and grace, represented by Isaac. And the point that Paul is making is that Law and Grace do not mix, they cannot mix, they can't co-exist together. In Galatians 4:21-31 Paul tells us, **“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: ‘Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.’ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”** Thus, as I have said, we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – period!

VERSES 23-27

1. So as God gave Abraham the command to be circumcised, what did he do? Did he have to go and pray about it? “Lord, circumcision, are you sure?” No, he did not have to do that because God said it and he just believed it and was obedient to what God said. I think many times God tells us to do something and just so people don’t get the idea that we are not spiritual, we say things like, “I would like to, but let me pray about it!” In other words, at least what I have seen, it means, “No way am I going to do that!” Folks if God said it, then you need to do it! For Abraham, his belief in the covenant was seen in his obedience to God’s Word. You see, what we believe will be manifested in our lives, in our actions!

2. Also notice that Abraham’s obedience was *complete*; he circumcised every male in his house. His obedience was *prompt*, the very day God spoke to him he responded. And his obedience was *daring*. Think about it, all his fighting men have been circumcised and I can tell you, not from experience, but it is just obvious to me, these guys were not going to be able to fight for a while, they would be in too much pain!

And so we see the faith of this man as He walks in obedience to God, trusting that God will provide all that He has promised him. How about you, can you walk by faith trusting in the promises of God that He has for you? He wants you to and walking is the only way your faith is going to grow, walking in accordance with God’s Word! May our faith continue to grow in Him as He leads us!