



OPENING COMMENT

Abram has been living with the unfulfilled promises of God for the better part of 25 years. That means he is living with the expectation that God will move and fulfill his promises at any moment. It is no wonder that he has faltered and failed along the way. The promises of God were, at least as we have them recorded, ambiguous and open-ended. Day after day, month after month, year after year the faith of Abram was kept alive by periodic visits from God and a reminder of His future promise. So, when we come to Genesis 17 it is not surprising to find Abram both fed up with God and yet ultimately obedient to his commands.

READ THE TEXT: Genesis 17

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ²that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” ³Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷And 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. ⁸And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

⁹And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you



and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, ¹³both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

¹⁵And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” ¹⁷Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” ¹⁸And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” ¹⁹God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. ²⁰As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”

²²When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. ²³Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. ²⁴Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁵And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁶That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. ²⁷And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. God starts the conversation with Abram by dictating two commands, what are those commands? (vs. 1)
2. Compare the promises God makes with Abram in Genesis 12 and 15 with the promise found here in chapter 17:1-8. What are the differences, what are the similarities?
3. What is the sign God outlines for the covenant? Who did it apply to? What if you did not want to participate?
4. What is Abraham's initial response?



5. What do verses 15-21 reveal about God's character?
6. What is Abraham's immediate response once God left him?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. The initial command from God to Abram is to be in fellowship with Him. In what ways do you purposefully fellowship with God?
2. The second part of the command is to obey what God has commanded. Where is God asking you to be obedient at this point?
3. It is here that we begin to see that the promises of God move beyond a single nation and move to multiple nations, giving us a clue to the scope of God's global plan of inclusion. How should this understanding orient our lives?
4. Even though the promises of God are taking shape (they are becoming more specific), God is still calling Abraham and Sarah to a life of faith. How is God currently calling you to live in faith?
5. After Abraham's encounter with God he immediately follows through in obedience. We may be tempted to gloss over the discomfort this obedience required, but it is important to remember the level of obedience being displayed. Where is God calling you to radical obedience? Do you find yourself willingly submitting your will to God as Abraham did? If not, what is in the way? If so, what motivated your obedience?

BIBLICAL THREAD

1. Genesis 12 – Initial call from God to Abram to trust and follow.
2. Genesis 15 – God declares himself faithful and makes a covenant with Abram.
3. Leviticus 26:41 – talking about the uncircumcision of the heart in Israel.
4. Deuteronomy 10:12-22 – God call's Israel to a circumcised heart.
5. Ezekiel 11:19 – god will give his people a new heart.
6. Acts 15 – Circumcision is debated in the new covenant of Christ.
7. Romans 2:25-29 – Paul dissects the physical circumcision with the circumcision of the heart.
8. Revelation 5:9-10 – A picture of the scope of the promise of God made to Abraham in the final days.



CONCLUSION

The God revealed in scripture is a God of promises. This same God is also faithful to those promises. He promised Abraham offspring as numerous as the stars and he continues to deliver on that promise to this day. This should give us great confidence as we seek to follow Him in faith. God has, through the scriptures, asked each of us to follow in radical obedience to His command no matter how uncomfortable it might make us. Reminding ourselves of His faithfulness in history should grant us great courage as we step out in obedience and faith in the unknown.

Abraham clearly thought the promises he was hearing were ludicrous, yet he followed in obedience to God's commands. We would be wise to follow in Abraham's footsteps.

SHARE & PRAY

LIFE GROUP VISION:

The goal to meeting together around the word of God is three fold. First, we want to more clearly understand what God is saying to us through His Word and apply it to our own hearts and minds. Secondly, we want to build a loving community with each other to disciple one another toward maturity in Christ. Thirdly, we desire each of us, as ambassadors of Christ, to look outwards to our community and ask how we can bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those whom God has placed in our lives.

