

The Covenant Established

Genesis 17

Abram Made Great

Genesis 17:1-6

The LORD'S Appearance: *Genesis 17:1-3*

Abram's Blessing

Thirteen years passed since Abram and Sarai's impatient and poor decision. Abram was ninety-nine years old and Ishmael was a young man. It was unknown when, or if, God would appear. While waiting, Abram lived by faith, because the promise of Isaac remained but the fulfillment was delayed.

The LORD appeared and presented Himself as the Almighty God, establishing His authority. Abraham's personal conduct was immediately addressed. It is clear that the LORD is concerned with our actions.

1. *Abram was to walk before Him* – to walk before someone is to walk within sight, God wanted Abram to walk under His inspection, care, and protection.
2. *Abram was to be perfect* – he was to live upright and his conduct was to be correct.

The LORD promised to multiply Abram exceedingly. Abram was greatly concerned with the land and God confirmed it belonged to him and his descendants. Here, the LORD enlarged Abram's knowledge of the covenant. Knowledge comes by degrees and through time; nothing is learned completely in one sitting. Those that diligently study the Word of God gain the knowledge God provides (Psalm 119:103-105).

Abram's Reverence

Abram fell to the ground and listened as God spoke. Perhaps Abram was overcome with God's presence, similar to Daniel and John's experiences (Daniel 8:17, 10:9-15; Revelation 1:17). Falling before the LORD is a humble act of honor and reverence. In doing so, Abram displayed his great respect and fear of God.

The LORD remains the same and our approach to Him should be like Abram's, with reverence and respect. Too many are more concerned about their comforts instead of honoring God. The result, modern churches are centers of self-pleasure where God and His teachings have been replaced with entertainment to gratify fleshly emotions. The focus has shifted from the LORD to the people, and all is done to please those in attendance so they continue to return (2 Timothy 4:3). The reverence and respect for the LORD has vanished and along with it proper worship and conduct.

The LORD'S Confirmation: *Genesis 17:4-6*

Abram Would be a Father of Many

The LORD is faithful and will never fail to keep His word. Abram would be a father of many nations and God changed his name to reflect the blessing.

1. *Abram* – means high father.
2. *Abraham* – means father of a multitude.

His new name resembled the promise, which was given to Abram before Isaac was born. This would provide encouragement as he waited upon the LORD.

Abram Would be Exceedingly Fruitful

It is nice to be fruitful, whether it is spiritual or physical blessings. Abram was promised a rich heritage. His lineage would produce nations and kings would and would be the spiritual patriarch of all believers (Romans 4:16-17). Abraham is the most respected man in the history of the world, with Jews, Christians, and Muslims honoring and respecting him.

As Abram continued he might have wondered when or how God would bless. It is possible he became concerned about the future and the LORD'S plan. The LORD'S word served as a reminder to Abram that God had not forgotten him or His promise to him. The LORD provided enough information for Abram to be encouraged and continue.

Abram's Family Enlarged

Genesis 17:7-14

The Promise: *Genesis 17:7-8*

The Everlasting Covenant

The LORD'S covenant was established with Abraham and his descendants through Isaac. The land was given to them and nobody else has a claim on it. The covenant was everlasting, meaning it will never be altered, fixed, or ratified. Like His Word it was perfect and complete. The covenant will also last forever and never be replaced. Because of this, the covenant did not end with Abraham's death but remains to this day.

The Everlasting Possession

The LORD promised to give Abraham the land for an everlasting possession. It belonged to him and his descendants and contrary to popular belief involved the nation and not a church. So, whom does the land belong to today? Many, including prominent national and world leaders, believe the Palestinians deserve the land. Why, because they say so. There is no claim to the land outside their boisterous demonstrations. The land belongs to the Jewish people. God has given it to them and it was

claimed and inhabited years back. Whether we agree or not, the land belongs to them and the LORD will be true to His word.

The Token: *Genesis 17:9-14*

The Details of the Token

Abraham was directed to circumcise every male in the family (Acts 7:8; Romans 4:11). Circumcision had no effect on the covenant, which was already made, but was a seal to validate the agreement. Today, legal documents are notarized to verify authenticity. Circumcision was a physical reminder of God's promise to Abraham and his descendants.

Circumcision was to be performed eight days after birth and was an act of submission by the parents. It was to be for every male, no exceptions, even servants. Only men were given a token because men are the head of the family. Women were included under the leadership of the male. Those that refused circumcision would be cutoff from God and His covenant. The covenant remained, nothing could or would change it, but the offender was removed and lost the blessing of the covenant.

The Importance of the Token

Circumcision was a token of the covenant. It came as a result of the covenant and represented the promise God made. Abraham did not receive the promise because of circumcision; his circumcision served as a symbol of the covenant. Similarly, salvation comes before baptism and church membership. Scriptural baptism comes after one has been saved and regenerated, as a sign of the new life in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:3-9).

Circumcision was an act of separation. The entire family was required to follow to display their separation from the world. When the Law was given at Sinai circumcision was a main feature (Leviticus 12:3). It became a national statute, originating with Abraham and the patriarchs (Romans 2:25; Galatians 5:2-3). Like the entire law, circumcision was binding and burdensome, and offered no life by it (James 2:10-11). All of the males born in the wilderness were required to be circumcised, before entering the land God promised (Joshua 5:19). The facts are conclusive, circumcision was a national rite tied to the law and concerning the land.

Abraham's Immediate Response

Genesis 17:15-27

Abraham's Amazement: *Genesis 17:15-22*

The LORD Confirmed His Plan

The LORD confirmed that Abraham and Sarai would have a son and Sarai's name was changed to reflect this blessing.

1. *Sarai* – means my princess.

2. *Sarah* – means a princess, implying a princess of many.

God would honor His promise and Sarah would be blessed with a son. Though they had made a mistake, the LORD would keep His word because He is faithful. Like Abraham, Sarah's descendants would be great, including nations and kings. Sarah learned the hard way that it is better to wait upon the LORD (Psalm 27:14). Upon hearing this, Abraham fell upon his face and laughed in amazement. The LORD knew his heart and evidently Abraham laughed with joy and not distrust. He was amazed they would have a child, due to their old age. Abraham was in awe not in doubt, knowing God could perform all that he promised (Romans 4:19-20). When the works of the LORD are considered, His greatness becomes evident.

The LORD Confirmed Isaac Would Inherit the Promise

Abraham loved Ishmael and asked the LORD to remember and bless him. Abraham probably did not desire Ishmael over Isaac, but likely did not want Ishmael forgotten. The LORD made it clear that Abraham and Sarah would have a son, Isaac, and the promised line would go through him and not Ishmael. It is no up to us to determine the direction but follow as God leads.

The LORD would bless Ishmael, making him fruitful. Ishmael would be a great nation. Today the Arab nations are his descendants and according to John Phillips, "The Arab world stretches from the seaboard of the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf, and embraces some seventeen of the most strategically placed and economically wealthy countries of the world". The LORD answered Abraham's prayer, and though Isaac would be chosen for the covenant, Ishmael would be blessed as well.

Abraham's Obedience: *Genesis 17:23-27*

Abraham Followed the LORD'S Direction

He acted immediately and without delay or hesitation (Psalm 119:60). It is best to act instantly upon God's direction. Those that wait for a convenient time, often find themselves waiting until it's too late, whether the decision involves salvation or service to God.

He acted without an opinion, complaint or argument, God being his final authority. Circumcision was a painful procedure and the adult males may have naturally wanted to avoid it. It was humiliating for the men and would make them vulnerable to an attack during recovery. But it was a command from God, so it was obeyed. To Abraham, it mattered not what people thought but what the LORD directed. Obedience was important to him and should be to all believers (1 Samuel 15:22; James 4:17).

Abraham Led His Family After the LORD

Abraham did not excuse himself, but led the way as an example of obedience. Take note, he was righteous before he was circumcised. Ishmael was also circumcised, and it did nothing for his cruel heart (Genesis 21:9). All of the males under his authority were circumcised and nobody was left out. Abraham displayed great leadership and obedience.

Conclusion

After a lengthy period of time, God again visited Abraham. This time the LORD encouraged him and provided information concerning the covenant. Abraham was promised great blessings and given a token for the covenant. God would keep His word. Today, the LORD remains faithful. His word can be trusted because it will be kept. *As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. Psalm 18:30*

Point to Ponder

Sometimes, God leads His people in stages.

Quote

"The more we know of God, the stronger and richer will be our lives." W. Griffith Thomas

Questions

Why was Abram required to walk with God?

How did Abram's new name, Abraham, resemble God's promise?

Why did God change Sarai's name to Sarah?

What was Abraham's response to God's command?

What new truth have you learned from this lesson?