



Sunday School Lesson for September 10, 2006

Released on September 6, 2006

"God's Covenant with Abram"

Printed Text: Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22.

Background Scripture: Genesis 17.

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 6:13-20.

Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

.....

15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.

16 And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

18 And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!

19 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.

21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

22 And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to examine God's covenant with Abram.

Principle: to show that God blesses those who keep covenant with Him.

Application: to know that the result of trusting God is to receive His blessing.

How to Say It

ABRAHAM. Ay-bruh-ham.

ABRAM. Ay-brum.

CANAAN. Kay-nun.

ESAU. *Ee-saw*.

HAGAR. *Hay-gar*.

HARAN. *Hair-un*.

ISAAC. *Eye-zuk*.

ISHMAEL. *Ish-may-el*

INTRODUCTION

When a person reaches retirement age, he may launch himself into another full-time or part-time type of work that is not as strenuous as what he did before. He may decide to do some kind of volunteer work to keep himself occupied. He may devote himself to family concerns. He may give more time and effort to church programs.

However, when a person reaches the advanced age of ninety-nine, people hardly expect him to do much more than take care of his health and spend his time relaxing with less stressful activities.

Abram was ninety-nine years old when God appeared to him and confirmed His covenant with him. Echoing what is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3, the Lord told His servant that he would have a multitude of descendants who would inherit the land of Canaan.

Sarai, Abram's wife, had her name changed to "Sarah," meaning princess. This foreshadowed the fact that at her advanced age she was to become the mother of nations and produce kings. This announcement by God amazed her and her husband. Abraham wanted the promise to come through Ishmael, but God would do it through another son, Isaac.

1. How did God describe Himself to Abram (Genesis 17:1)?

The Lord identifies himself with His first words to Abram. He is not just *God*, but He is *Almighty*. This God is one who can accomplish things that are considered impossible. Over 1,400 years later Jeremiah will echo the same thought when he writes that nothing is too difficult for God (Jeremiah 32:17).

2. Did God expect sinless perfection from Abram? Explain.

As for Abram, God expected him to walk before Him in a perfect (upright, sincere) way. Being human, Abram would not attain absolute perfection in his walk before God, but he was to strive to have the right heart attitude. If he fell short, he was to confess it and seek forgiveness and restoration by God.

3. How was Genesis 17:2 a confirmation of 12:2 (see vs. 2,3)?

When God had called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees, He had told him, "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:2). Now God told him again that He would multiply him exceedingly. This was preparing Abram for the announcement of a change in his name (17:5).

As we might expect, Abram was overwhelmed when God appeared directly to him. Abram's immediate response is to fall and assume a position of utmost respect. The implications of what the Lord has just said are racing through his mind, and he is overwhelmed! God's next words reinforce the thought that Abram is to have many descendants.

4. What were the meanings of the names "Abram" and "Abraham" (vs. 4,5)?

In verse 4 God states that the covenant being made is with Abram, and one outcome is that *many nations* will result. The factor of *nations* (plural) is a new concept. The singular form of the word is used in Genesis 12:2, so this adds a dimension to the promises that God is making.

This fact demanded a change in his name from "Abram," meaning "high father," to "Abraham," meaning "father of a multitude."

It is interesting that Jews, Christians, and Muslims all revere Abraham and consider him either their physical or their spiritual father.

5. What did God reveal in His "covenant" with Abraham concerning his offspring (vs. 6,7)?

The thought that Abraham will be a *father of many nations* is amplified: Abraham's descendants will be "exceeding fruitful."

Abraham's offspring will also include kings. This is a new factor, not mentioned previously. Moses (the author of Genesis) will later record the names of several kings who are descendants of Abraham's grandson Esau (Genesis 36:31-39). Students of biblical history are aware of Saul, David, Solomon, and other kings who trace their lineage to Abraham (Matthew 1:2-11). God's promises do come to pass!

This special *covenant* relationship (v. 7) will continue into the future for the children of Abraham, for it is an *"everlasting covenant."*

6. Covenants are based upon promises. These include promises of commitment on the part of both parties entering into the covenant. What promises of God, revealed in both His old and new covenants, help you to face life daily?

God has promised to give comfort (Isaiah 51:3) as well as hope (Hebrews 6:18, 19). God has promised that those who go forth with weeping for the master will return to Him with rejoicing (Psalm 126:6). In John 10:10 God has promised abundant life to His people. God has promised that those who seek first His kingdom will receive all things they need (Matthew 6:33). The list could go on!

7. How long would it be before Abraham possessed the land he was now in (v. 8)?

The land of Canaan had been promised to Abraham previously (Genesis 12:5, 7; 15:18). These words from God provide a further confirmation of that promise. There is a certain irony here: it has been 24 years since Abraham entered Canaan (compare Genesis 12:4, 5; 17:1), and so far Abraham does not possess any of it. God told Abraham previously that his descendants would be oppressed 400 years in another land, and in the fourth generation they would occupy Canaan when the iniquity of the inhabitants was full (Genesis 15:13, 16).

In Genesis 17:9-14 we learn that God required Abraham and his descendants to circumcise all males on the eighth day after birth as a token (sign, symbol) of the covenant God made with Abraham. This is a custom still observed by Jews and many others.

8. What did the name "Sarah" mean, and what did it indicate (vs. 15,16)?

The meanings of the names *Sarai* and *Sarah* seem to be the same, but there is the difference in spelling. Both names mean "princess." The mere fact of the change called attention to the importance of Sarah's role in God's plan.

Note that God's promise that "kings shall come out of thee" (v. 6), which was made to Abraham, was also given to Sarai (Sarah) when God said, "Kings of people shall be of her" in verse 16.

Perplexities of Abraham (Genesis 17:17-22)

9. How did Abraham react to hearing that Sarah would be pregnant (v. 17)?

When Abraham was told that Sarah would conceive when he was a hundred years old and she was ninety years old, he fell on his face and laughed at the thought.

When the Lord and two angels, all appearing as men, later came to Abraham's tent, he invited them in for a meal. When God's announcement that Sarah would bear a son was given, she overheard it. "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord (husband) being old also? And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son" (18:12-14).

We see, then, that both Abraham and Sarah laughed when told they would have a son in their old age after being childless all their lives. We assume that this laughter was not derisive in nature but due to incredulity that such a thing could happen.

10. What did God say would happen to Ishmael (vs. 18,19)?

Abraham now had a proposal for God, and certainly it must have seemed quite logical to him. He suggested that his son Ishmael, who was then thirteen years old (v. 25), might be his heir through whom the covenant promises would be fulfilled. Ishmael was already an adolescent and would become an adult in a few years. Abraham must have felt that he could groom him to take his place before his own old age led to his passing.

But God rejected Abraham's proposal regarding Ishmael. He repeated His announcement that Sarah would indeed bear a son. His name was to be "Isaac," which means "laughter," or "he laughs." When Isaac was born, Sarah said, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me" (21:6). The laughter of incredulity gave way to the laughter of celebration.

It was through Isaac, the son of promise, that God's covenant promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. God had told Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (12:3). Jewish people, with their God-given intelligence and skills, have helped fulfill this promise, but it is truly fulfilled only through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. It was not through Ishmael that He came but through Isaac.

11. Why did God tell Abraham "I have heard thee" (v. 20)?

The Lord knew of Abraham's affection for Ishmael, and He made it clear that this son would flourish in the years ahead. God said that Ishmael would be blessed, be fruitful, multiply exceedingly, father twelve princes, and become a great nation.

Having assured Abraham of what would happen to Ishmael, God now made it very clear that His covenant would be established through a child who had not even been conceived yet (v. 21).

The closing words of God in this account restate the factors that are to have imminent fulfillments: that the *covenant* is to be continued through *Isaac*, that *Sarah* is to be the mother, and that these things will occur *the next year*. One can only wonder concerning Abraham's final reflections and actions: will they be outwardly exuberant and joyful, silent and profound contemplation, or overwhelming gratitude? It will take time for the reality of the promises to be grasped fully.

God departs from Abraham, and this brings to a conclusion this stage of Abraham's developing role in the covenant (v. 22). There are more interactions to follow, but the new factors are overwhelming.

CONCLUSION

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is—unless God is in it. The covenant that God made with Abraham offered promises that another human could not deliver. It is

comforting to know that God did not hold the negative reactions of Abraham and Sarah against them. Their reservations did not thwart God's redemptive plan.

It is God's plan to provide Heaven for all the redeemed. That's something that sounds just too good to be true, but it is true. It sounds too good to be true that God forgives and forgets the sins of the redeemed, but God does that-even though we tend to burden ourselves with memories of our failures.

God offers Heaven to sinners who believe on His Son and follow His plan of salvation. That sounds too good to be true-but it is true!

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Trust God despite your doubts.

PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for the trials of life that develop patience. Forgive my lack of trust in those times. In the name of Your Son, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our next lesson, we will explore the covenant God made with Israel and how He sought to bless them. Study **Exodus 19:1-6; 24:3-8 "God's Covenant with Israel."**

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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