

Bibles?

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Let's pray...

So for the past couple of weeks as our text has focused on the life of Abram, we have been taken on a roller coaster ride regarding his faith.

We see spiritual victory followed by a lapse in faith – Abram obeys the Lord and arrives in Canaan and builds an altar for Him and then he flees to Egypt, Abram is forced out of Egypt and he goes back to Canaan – rescues his nephew Lot, declared his allegiance to Melchizedek over the King of Sodom – and then he suffers another lapse in faith as Abram and Sarai – still without any children, despite God's promises – they take it upon themselves and Hagar is given to Abram and now they have Ishmael.

Time is running out on Abraham and Sarah – their faith continues to get tested – every year that they wait, the possibility of them having children becomes less possible.

However, with God – we must remember that nothing is impossible!

Though God's promise of children had been given over 25 years earlier, the Lord was waiting for Abraham and Sarah's natural ability to have children to pass.

He wanted their son to be a miracle so that the people who would come from Abraham would realize from start to finish they are a testimony to God's power & His grace, not man's strength or effort.

So let's look at our text this evening,

[Gen 17:1-2 NKJV] 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I [am] Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 "And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

13 years had passed since the scriptures reveal to us that God spoke to Abram.

This was a time of testing for Abram and Sarai - you see, God is in the process of making a man of faith out of Abram, and He is making a man or a woman of faith out of each and every one of us here tonight.

There will be times in our Christian walk where God will be silent.

Times where we will have to endure trial after trial – and many times we will think that there is no way that we will be able overcome.

Times were nothing is going our way.

I am pretty sure many of us have gone through periods like this, yet we are still here by the grace of God.

Why would God allow us to go through these trials?

We have to remember that faith means that we walk not by what we see or by what we hear.

Faith means that we walk according to the word of God and hold on to His promises.

You see, the reason that God allows us to go through these periods is to teach us to be men and women of faith – to confidently believe that God is on the throne and that He is in control over everything.

So here in verse one God appears to Abram and the first words that He speaks is a reminder to Abram of who He is, “I am the Almighty God”

In the Hebrew, Almighty God is “El Shaddai”, it is the first time that this name is used in the scriptures.

“I am ***El Shaddai***”

Some have translated the name to mean “I am Sufficient” and others like Donald Barnhouse, who was a preacher and theologian, have translated El Shaddai as “One who guides us through His strength and His nourishment”

So after the proclamation – God tells Abram to walk before Me and be blameless.

In scripture, revelation always comes before expectation. God always reveals who He is and then God tells us how we should respond.

The word “blameless” does not mean “sinless”. It means “single-hearted, wholly devoted to the Lord.”

God desires a full commitment of Abram –

In the same way that He desires a full commitment from us.

We are also called to be blameless before Him.

[Hebrews 12:14 NKJV] 14 **Pursue peace with all [people], and holiness,**
without which no one will see the Lord:

[1John 2:3-6 NKJV] 3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we
keep His commandments. 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not
keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But
whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By
this we know that we are in Him. 6 **He who says he abides in Him**
ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

The problem church is that many times we try to do this by ourselves.

Attempting to pursue holiness without God is empty religion and will simply
lead to empty works.

We will never achieve holiness because only God is holy.

We can only do what God expects of us when we know who He is, and we
know it in a full, personal, and real way.

This is why we must be in the word daily. This is why we must be in prayer
always – He has given us these precepts so that we may know Him.

[Gen 17:2-8 NKJV] 2 "And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 "Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

God then proceeds to once again remind Abram of the covenant. Notice how often He says "I will,"

God is the one doing the work in the covenant.

You see, it is a covenant based solely on grace.

After reminding Abraham of the covenant – God changes his name from Abram to Abraham.

From “Father of many” to “Father of many nations”

God changed his name to Father of many yet Abraham is 99 and a father of one – Ishmael.

Please notice that covenant that God made with Abraham also included the land as an everlasting possession.

And to this day, we have conflict between the Jewish nation and the other nations in the area. Whose nation does it belong to – God promised it to Abraham’s descendants?

[Gen 17:9-14 NKJV] 9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 "This [is] My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; 11 "and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 "He who is eight days old among you shall be

circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. 13 "He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 "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."

Last week as we covered chapter 15, we remember that Abram asked for a sign of the covenant – he wanted it in writing and God told Abram to bring a three year old heifer and a three year old female goat and ram along with a turtledove and young pigeon.

Abram cuts the animals up in half and later on in the chapter we see God honoring the contract by walking among the pieces.

Now God is asking Abraham and his descendants to memorialize the covenant with a sign.

The sign that He chose was one of circumcision.

Every male child born was to be circumcised the day they turned eight days old.

Every servant had to be circumcised.

This past Sunday, we discussed the reasons behind Paul circumcising Timothy. He would have been an apostate Jew – he would have been deemed as someone who had broken God’s covenant by not being physically circumcised.

Circumcision was supposed to set the Jews apart from the entire world.

It was the cutting away of the flesh that separated the Jews from everyone else.

The problem is that they failed to see the true meaning of what circumcision was about?

It went beyond a religious ritual.

Even Moses later on in the book of Deuteronomy –

He tells the Children of Israel as they are about to the second set of tablets with the 10 commandments – Moses actually breaks the first set of tablets in anger.

Deut 10:16 Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

You see, It was always about the heart!

It was about living a consecrated life to the Lord.

Turn with me to the book of Romans

[Rom 2:25-29 NKJV] 25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27 And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, [even] with [your] written [code] and circumcision, [are] a transgressor of the law? 28 For he is not a Jew who [is one] outwardly, nor [is] circumcision that which [is] outward in the flesh; 29 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.

As believers, we memorialize the new covenant by partaking of communion – we remember what Jesus Christ did on the cross – we remember His sacrifice and the significance of it.

[Gen 17:15-18 NKJV] 15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah [shall be] her name. 16 "And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be [a mother of] nations; kings of peoples shall be from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall [a child] be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear [a child]?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"

In verse 15 God changes the name of Sarai as well to Sarah.

One commentator wrote: Sarai signifies my lady, or my princess, which confines her dominion to one family; but Sarah signifies either a lady or

princess, simply and absolutely without restriction, or the princess of a multitude.”

God also makes it clear in verse 16 that through Sarah will the son be born and that she will be a mother to many nations – it was not going to come through another surrogate like Hagar. It was going to happen through Sarah.

Abraham’s response is of disbelief – Sarah is barren and she is approaching 90 years old. Abraham himself is approaching 100 years old.

This isn’t a laugh of mockery or unbelief, but one of ecstasy and elation.

Abraham then remember his son Ishmael – Ishmael is 13 years old now – what going to happen to Ishmael???

Let’s look at verse 18 again,

18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"

Abraham is asking God if Ishmael can be the beneficiary of the blessing.

Abraham created a mess when he took Hagar. Now he is asking God to bless the mess that he created.

We do this all the time, we make decisions without asking God – we start a new business, change jobs, move to a different city, buy a car you should have never purchased in the first place – and when it all comes crashing down, we ask God to bless our mess.

Abraham might have been sincere in his request to God. After all, for the last 13 years, he has seen Ishmael grow before his eyes.

Like any father, Abraham wants the best for his son. However, that decision belongs to God.

Let's take a look at God's answer.

[Gen 17:19-27 NKJV] 19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, [and] with his descendants after him.

Ishmael was not the child of God's promise, therefore he could not be the channel of God's blessing.

The child of God's promise would come through Sarah and God tells Abraham to name him Laughter. (That is what Isaac means)

Isaac was the one whom the covenant would be established, for Isaac was the product of God's grace.

20 "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year." 22 Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

Even though Ishmael was not going to be the child where the covenant will be established through, God still blesses Ishmael and makes him the father of the Arab nations.

23 So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him. 24 Abraham [was] ninety-nine

years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son [was] thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; 27 and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

From verse 23-27, we see Abraham obedience to the word of God as he not only circumcises himself – at the age of 99, he circumcises Ishmael and he circumcises all of his servants just as God commanded him to.

This act in itself took tremendous faith, because Abraham and all his servants would have been incapacitated during this time.

Yet God protected them from harm.

[Gen 18:1-15 NKJV] 1 Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw [them], he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, 3 and said, "My Lord, if I

have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. 4
"Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest
yourselves under the tree. 5 "And I will bring a morsel of bread, that
you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as
you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said." 6
So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make
ready three measures of fine meal; knead [it] and make cakes." 7 And
Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave [it] to a
young man, and he hastened to prepare it. 8 So he took butter and
milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set [it] before them; and
he stood by them under the tree as they ate. 9 Then they said to him,
"Where [is] Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." 10 And
He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and
behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the
tent door which [was] behind him.) 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were
old, well advanced in age; [and] Sarah had passed the age of
childbearing. 12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After
I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13

And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear [a child], since I am old?' 14 "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied [it], saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

Here at the start of chapter 18, we have three visitors that come to visit Abraham and Sarah. One of them is the Lord – here is another example of the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, the other two are angels.

We will see these same two angels go into Sodom in our study next week.

These visitors come to Abraham and Sarah with an announcement – that within one year, Sarah was going to have a son.

Her response is similar to Abraham's in the last chapter.

It is one of laughter –

God heard Sarah's laugh even though she laughed within herself. The sense was, her laugh could not be heard normally, but God heard it nevertheless.

There is nothing hidden before the LORD.

The thing I want to point out is that God doesn't condemn Sarah for her unbelief –

He doesn't say sorry, you blew it. I am going to find someone else.

However, God does remind her that He knows her heart and whatever she is doing behind the tent walls.

Church, we have a merciful and gracious God who understands that at times, we too may encounter doubt –

This is why He has given us examples after examples to demonstrate that He is faithful to fulfill every promise that He makes.

We may not understand the circumstances

Amen!

Let's pray...

