

THE PROMISE OF NEW SON (vv. 15-22)

¹⁵ God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

¹⁹ Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. ¹ I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”

²² When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

1. How does Abraham respond to the promise that God would give him a son through Sarai?
2. Why do you think Abram pleaded for the blessing to come through Ishmael instead?
3. Why do you think God insisted that the promise would come through Isaac?
4. Isaac means laughter. What is the significance of the child's name?

AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE (vv. 23-27)

²³ On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, ²⁵ and his son Ishmael was thirteen; ²⁶ Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that very day. ²⁷ And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

1. What do you make of the immediacy of Abraham's response to God's requirement?
2. What can we learn from Abraham's responsiveness?
3. What are some of the significant truths we are learning about God's power and God's promises in our study of Abraham?



Abram is nearly a hundred years old now. He has a pre-teen son. He is more than content for Ishmael to bear the family name and inherit God's promise, but God is not.

God chooses this moment to renew his commitment to Abram. While having a child is all but impossible for Abram and Sarai, it is a small thing for God to bless them with a child. God is making a statement. He wants them to know; he wants future generations to know; he wants us to know that this child will be nothing short of miraculous. While every child is a gift from God, it will be far more evident in the birth of Isaac.

Before Isaac is born, however, God has something to ask of Abram. In Genesis 15, God bound himself to Abram by walking through the sacrificial animals. Now God asks Abram to bind himself to him in a covenant ceremony of his own.

We often speak of God's covenant with Abram as an unconditional covenant—a covenant based solely on God's faithfulness to Abram. But God does have conditions, he always has. God's promise to Abram as remarkable as it is, is preceded by a command. “The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you (Genesis 12:1).” Abram would have to step out in obedience if he wanted to step into the promise. There is a conditional element in chapter 18 as well, “...walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between men and you (vv. 1-2).”

Does that mean that God's promise hangs on the thin thread of Abram's faithfulness? Not at all. God never calls us to be or do anything that he does not enable us to be and do. Paul reminds the believers in Thessalonica, “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24).”

God's faithfulness to Abram will empower and enable Abram to “walk faithfully” before God.” By the end of the chapter, Abram will have a new name, a new covenant sign, and the promise of a new son.

A NEW NAME (vv. 1-8)

17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.

2 Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 4 “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, c for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

1. What do we learn about Abram in verse 1? Why is this important for the story?
2. How does God reveal himself to Abram? Why is this important for the story?
3. What does God ask of Abram?
4. What does it mean to “walk faithfully before God and be blameless?”
5. Is this a requirement for those who live under the New Covenant as well? Why or why not?
6. Why is it important for Abram to remember who God is before he endeavors to “walk faithfully before him and be blameless?”
7. What do we make of the fact that in this particular instance, God’s promises seem to be based on Abram’s faithfulness, while in other cases, they seem to be conditioned on God’s faithfulness alone?
8. How does Abram respond to the Lord’s presence? Do you find any significance in his response?
9. While we tend to choose names for our children that sound cool and have a nice rhythm, the ancients chose names that described their hope for their child’s future. A change of name usually signified a change of destiny. How had Abram’s encounter with the living God changed his destiny? What is the significance of his new name? What is significant about the fact that he received his name from God rather than his parents or his peers?
10. How does God expand and enlarge upon his promises to Abraham?

A NEW COVENANT SIGN (vv.9-14)

9 Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. 13 Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

14 Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

1. Circumcision was considered a rite of passage for young men in several ancient cultures. In some cases, it marked the passage from adolescence to manhood; in other instances, it was part of the marriage ritual. What bearing might circumcision have on the promises God has just made to Abram? How is the practice God prescribes for Abram and his descendants different from those of surrounding cultures? Do you find any significance in the differences?
2. What do you make of the fact that foreigners who became part of Abraham’s household were to be circumcised as well? How does this foreshadow the fulfillment of God’s promise that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you?”
3. Overtime, Abram’s descendants, began to rely on circumcision as the singular sign of the covenant. The prophets begin to warn them that God was looking for a people “circumcised in heart and mind” rather than simply “circumcised in the flesh (see Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:29).” How would you describe the distinguishing mark of people who are “walking faithfully before God?”