

What You Need to Know About ABRAHAM:

“God Is Faithful to Keep His Promises”

Study Number Five – Genesis 17:1-22

Father, we thank You for the privilege of teaching Your Word. The sheer excitement about this passage is beyond human comprehension, just the privilege of opening Your Word now and having it speak to us. We pray Your Holy Spirit will move among us and that we will see relevancy to that which is being taught and that we would each want to apply it to our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Our last passage was kind of a low time, wasn't it? Emotionally we get involved with these characters and think they are so sound, so spiritual and so wonderful and then we see them get into the mess.

Isn't it interesting that we left Abram when he was 86 years old, Sarai was 76, and what's the very first verse in our passage? Abram is 99 years old, Sarai is 89 years old.

There's a consequence when we try to fulfil God's promises on our own or try to guess at what God is doing and therefore want to be fully cooperative by helping Him.

For these thirteen years they've been living in the flesh, out of

the will of God, assuming that everything is alright. But for thirteen years they have to worry. There's no altar during these thirteen years, there's no spiritual growth, there's anxiety and frustration. All of these things are there, but they still assume that they have accomplished their purpose.

No fruit, no growth, nothing significant taking place, no progress, no altar, no communication between them and the Lord.

Now this is the third time that we've seen this in the life of Abram.

First of all, God told him to go to Ur of the Chaldees and they stopped in Heran until daddy Terah died. And then after those six years of being out of the place where God would have them be, they made their way to Ur of Chaldees.

But because of citizens already living there and economic hard times they went right through the land and went on down to Egypt, which is a 250-mile trip south.

For that time, they're out of the will of God because there was no altar, there was no instruction from the Lord that they should have done that.

And so we grieved with them as they came back with much wealth, but being literally deported from the land by Pharaoh himself.

Now they have been twenty-four years in the land as the scene of the study opens. Because of what they did in bringing Hagar into the picture—a daughter of Ham, the cursed line—and in assuming that she could be the one who would give birth to the promised child. Ishmael has been born.

As the scene of the study opens, Ishmael is a teenager. What do we think they are thinking? They probably think that everything's great. A lot of people think that if they have no hassles and no crisis and no tests, God is really smiling down on them and everything's going great.

That's the way we think. And we can assume that's the way they think, because we're going to see Abram still not willing to give up on his plan, even as we get to the end of the passage.

And so our assumption is valid. Thirteen more years in the land has made him a respected leader. He's recognized by everybody around as a good man and everything's just rocking along pretty smoothly.

Now there's one thing that happens and that is we become complacent. And there's another thing that happens when we get a little older, and that is we begin to relax and to enjoy relaxed living.

And if we equate a relaxed lifestyle with great spirituality then we've missed the message of the scripture.

The apostle Paul would say with great intensity right at the end of it, “I am pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high call of God in Christ.” He’s spending himself totally and completely in His service.

So here they are, approaching a hundred years on the part of Abram, and ninety for this barren woman that he’s married to.

A man was interviewed when he reached his 100th birthday. His comment to the press was, “It’s been fun but I wouldn’t want to do it over again.”

A woman was a little more creative when she said, “The thing I enjoy the most is the absence of peer pressure.”

Ready? Let’s dig into the text.

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

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

In this episode it’s going to be all the Lord speaking. Everything is going to be coming from Him. He’s got a big job on His hands. He has to tell them the covenant is still intact and that they didn’t help Him at all. That the land is theirs

and will be theirs forever. And He has to tell them that the seed that's going to be grown is going to come from Sarai and not some cursed woman from Egypt.

And those are going to be hard transitions to make. But we're in the same boat. We assume things and we get at a distance from the Lord and things just kind of keep rocking along and we let it happen. And time gets away from us and we wake up one day realizing that we and the Lord are at a great distance because we're not on the same page. And that's where real lessons can be learned.

The first thing the Lord says is, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless."

One of the interesting things, when we study the Bible, when God introduces Himself in a specific way it's a name that He's using to minister to a need. For instance, remember when Aaron and Hur were holding up Joshua's arms so the battle down in the field could be won and he was exhausted? They called the Lord Jehovah Nissi, "the Lord our banner"—"His banner over us."

And so in scripture this is the first time we have the title "I am God Almighty."

This title is going to be used so many times in the remaining chapters we're going to be amazed that this is the first one.

"God Almighty." Remember singing that little song back there

a number of years ago, “El Shaddai, El Shaddai”? That’s this word.

“El Shaddai”—the Lord God Almighty.

If we were to translate that word it would be a word to describe “the mighty one,” the one who can accomplish whatever He wants and desires, including a ninety-nine-year-old man becoming a father and a ninety-year-old barren woman becoming a mother.

In essence He’s coming to remind them of His total independent greatness. The only reason we have waited this long for them to be ninety-nine and ninety is there’s absolutely no hope that the two of them could pull this off on their own.

God looks forward to man’s extremity because then that becomes God’s opportunity. And many times in our lives, when we’re pressed against the wall, when it’s like there just seems no way out, it’s at those times that God does a wondrous work in revealing that He is fully capable.

So the delay of thirteen more years is exactly on schedule, as far as the Lord is concerned. This is His plan, not the one that we saw in our last study.

Now, the word “El Shaddai” has some other shades of meaning. It also means “breasted one.” In other words, it would refer to the nurture, the place of sustenance and

nourishment. He's "El Shaddai."

Now great enough to accomplish it, but He provides the nourishment that's necessary. The strength could be another way we could translate it. The strength that's necessary to accomplish the task.

It's a principle of scripture that God never demands what He hasn't already provided. And what He is saying here is, "I am El Shaddai. I'm God Almighty, the Creator and the Sustainer."

So He introduces Himself to us with this brand-new title. But then He turns right around and He gives a **COMMAND**. And the command is very pregnant with meaning so read it closely to understand what He's saying.

"walk before me and be blameless."

Now that didn't say, "walk before me and be sinless." That's an impossibility.

What He's saying here is, "Sit on the front row so I can see you. Walk in front of Me so I don't have to hear that you're doing something behind My back. "

In other words, "I want you to understand that there is a new era that has come. And that is, you're going to be aware of the fact that I'm watching your every move. I'm fully aware of it and I want you to walk before Me and blameless without any

personal agendas or any plans of using that Egyptian handmaid to try to help Me out.”

And so we can put all kinds of things in that basic command. But all He is saying here is, “I want you wholehearted and I want your full cooperation in your conduct toward Me. I want you to be faithful. I want you to be loyal and let the Lord be the king of our lives.”

One writer put it this way:

This quality of whole-hearted devotion has ever been dear to God. It was this that He considered in Job, and loved in David. It is in favor of this that His eyes run to-and-fro to show Himself strong in the behalf of those who are perfect or blameless toward Him. It is for this that He pleads with Abraham and it was because He met with it to so large an extent in His character and obedience that He entered into the eternal covenant bond with him.
(source unknown)

Now what if the Lord was saying to us, “Walk before Me and be blameless”? Can we qualify?

Now we’re not saying sinless, okay? There’s a big difference. We’re talking about obedience. We’re talking about the passion of a heart. We’re talking about love for Jesus.

Can we walk before Him and be blameless in that sense? Or do we still have a relationship with God that is a joint effort?

Or do we still have a relationship with God that has some conditional clauses in it? Do we do this thing together?

That sounds good, doesn't it? But it doesn't fit after what we've been through in our last study.

So we raise these FIVE QUESTIONS:

1. Is my heart blameless with God?

As far as we know right now, is our heart blameless? Or is there some stuff that's been able to accumulate that's creating some real embarrassment to the Lord because we've become brittle, we've become critical, we've become cranky, we've become stubborn? All of these things of the flesh that we've let sneak in under the cracks and they're affecting and foiling the Spirit's work in our life?

Are we the person who in our heart is blameless with God?

2. Am I wholehearted towards Him?

Are we really wholehearted toward Him in the fact that He's the first thought of the morning and the last thought at night and we rejoice over the gift of life for today?

3. Is He first in our plans and pleasures, our friendships, our thoughts and our actions?

4. Is His will the rule of my life?

5. Is His love my light, His business my aim, His well-done, my exceeding great reward?

Abram is to walk before God and not before his own personal wants and wishes and desires. That's what He means by this.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him”

Is that unusual? We find the angel of the Lord appearing to Gideon when he was tramping out the grain. We find the angel of the Lord meeting Mr. and Mr. Manoah about the birth of a Nazarite son by the name of Samson.

We see the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus have an appearance with the Lord and He spoke to him out of the great light.

“walk before me”—in other words, “Sit on the front row so I can see you, so I'm aware of what's going on.”

According to Charles Spurgeon, this is what it means to walk before Him and be blameless:

(Morning and Evening by Charles H. Spurgeon)

O let me affectionately warn you, for it is a grievous thing when we can live contentedly without the present enjoyment of the Saviour's face.

p. 181

Is it a passion to seek His face and to be comfortable in His presence, laying our heartbreak and our burdens before Him?

He goes on to say:

(Morning and Evening by Charles H. Spurgeon)

No joy can excel that of the soldier of Christ: Jesus reveals Himself so graciously, and gives such sweet refreshment, that the warrior feels more calm and peace in his daily strife than others in their hours of rest. The highway of holiness is the highway of communion.

p. 194

Why does the Lord send down the rain upon the thirsty earth, and give the genial sunshine? Is it not that these may all help the fruits of the earth to yield food for man? Even so the Lord feeds and refreshes our souls that we may afterwards use our renewed strength in the promotion of His glory.

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J. Oswald Sanders comes right on behind that and verifies the same thing:

(Turning Points: Moments of Decision in the Presence of God by David Jeremiah)

“Nothing is easier for the aging person who is growing

increasingly infirm and experiencing some depression as a result than to turn inward and become self-occupied. That attitude of mind only exacerbates the problem. It is when with firm purpose we turn away from our own grief, aches, and ailments, and busy ourselves to relieve those of others, that we will obtain relief from our own.”

p. 24

There’s the picture of what He wants now at the beginning, “walk before me and be blameless.”

Carolyn Custis James makes this statement in observation of Abraham and Sarah at the beginning of the seventeenth chapter:

(Lost Women of the Bible: Finding Strength & Significance Through Their Stories by Carolyn Custis James)

He had brought this elderly couple to the point of fixed impossibility to show them that the promises rested on him alone.

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Notice something of an absence in this first verse that we would expect as a parent with an errant child? We never once find the Lord chewing somebody out for the past.

He said to that woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8, “Go and no longer be sinning.” No accusations, no condemnation, just “go and no longer be sinning.”

We see the exact same thing with the Prodigal Son. Here comes the robe, here comes the ring, here come the shoes, kill the fatted calf man, we're going to have a feast. Nothing about failure or the past.

We don't have one word about Abram and Sarai, "I told you, I told you, I told you I was going to do it. I promised it—the land, the seed, the stars, the sand! And what did you do? Ran out and tried to do it yourself."

They're going to do that anyway without God having them to lecture them for an hour before He turns the blessings back on them again.

We're saying that when God recognizes repentance and brokenness of heart, and He realizes that we're coming with genuine contrite spirit, God is ready to answer with the promises. And the other big thing we're going to learn is that their failure did not affect the promises of God one bit. Now doesn't that just light a fire?

So many times we think, "Oh I did this." And that's the end of the opportunity. And no it's not. It can very well be the beginning.

This is what Lewis Smedes says:

(Days of Grace Through the Year by Lewis B. Smedes)

*The man of integrity walks securely,
but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.*

PROVERBS 10:9

Any image of the true self is blended from many ingredients.

First, your true self is a grateful person. You feel the gladness that comes when you sense that every breath, every heartbeat, every good feeling, every touch of another person's friendly flesh on yours and every loving relationship another person offers you are all wonderful gifts to you.

Second, your true self is an integrated whole. Your life holds together, you are one. You are the same person in secret that you are in public; you have the courage to face unpleasant realities without disguising them; you have a natural bent for accepting and telling the truth even when you pay a price for telling it; and you try to keep your promises even when it costs you some inconvenience and sacrifice. In short, you are a person of integrity.

(page unknown)

That's all he's saying.

“Abram, let's not play footsie anymore. Let's don't have any of this business of you thinking and doing one thing and I have an agenda and the two are in conflict.”

“So, I'm the Lord God Almighty, I am El Shaddai; walk before me and be blameless.”

v. 2 I will confirm my covenant between me and you

and will greatly increase your numbers.”

“I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

That verse tells us that God’s promises are not affected by our failure and God is never surprised at what we are apart from what He is. And so He’s ready to move on in the future.

And in order for us to get a handle on that, He’s going to make seven great statements here of promise that starts with “I will.”

Spurgeon says:

(Morning and Evening by Charles H. Spurgeon)

Remember that you need much teaching, much upholding, much grace, and much humility, if your witnessing is to be to your Master’s glory.

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v. 3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,

“Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,”

Do we see his heart? The moment that he hears the words of the Lord, he’s on his face before God in this act of worship.

We could put down the word SUBMISSION to whatever God

wants to do, HUMBLED OBEDIENCE to any new word from the Lord.

So he's basically telling the Lord, "This is what I love. I want to walk before You and be blameless. We have made a real mess of it and I'm really sorry."

And the rest of the passage is the message from the God who has the power to perform what He promised.

Alexander MacLaren said:

(The Expositor's Bible: The Book of Psalms-Volume I- Psalms I-XXXVIII by A. Maclaren, D.D.)

The one desire of the heart which has tasted the abundance, satisfaction, delights, fulness of life, and clearness of light that attend the presence of God is that nothing may draw it thence
p. 355

There is nothing that will ever draw us away once we have learned to drink deeply of the well of His grace and the study of His word.

v. 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations."

"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations."

Now when we read that statement, what did we think? If we've been involved with Abram and Sarai and having Hagar be the substitute?

They're both giving each other a high five! It's got to be Ishmael after all!

Now that's all He said: "I'm going to confirm this covenant with you," speaking to Abram. "You'll be the father of many nations."

Sometimes our suppositions and our presumptions and our thoughts are certainly far from what God has intended, and that's the painful process that we've got to go through now.

We finally get through having to technically use that name "Abram" and we can finally call him "Abraham"—father of many nations. And we're going to be able to call her "Sarah" instead of "Sarai." She now is going to be "my princess" and he is going to be "the father of many nations."

Why is there a name change? Because God is now getting ready to fulfil the covenant. The time is here!

"Yes, it's been 25 years. You were 75 when you left over there to head toward the land of Canaan, for Ur of Chaldees. But that's exactly the amount of time I needed to get you prepared for what I was getting ready to do."

And so here's the picture.

v. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

“No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.”

Reason: “I have made you father of many nations.”

“So from here on in, you are going to be Abraham!”

Now, look at verse 6. There’s going to be some really loaded words here in just a few minutes so pay close attention.

v. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

“I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.”

In other words, this is something far bigger than we thought in the beginning.

Now let’s look at the 7 “I WILL’s”:

1. verse 2—“I will confirm my covenant between me and you.”

2. verse 6—“I will make you very fruitful;”

3. verse 6—“I will make nations of you,”
4. verse 7—“I will establish my covenant,”
5. verse 8—“I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you,”
6. verse 8—“I will be their God,”
7. verse 19—“I will establish my covenant with him”—that is Isaac, as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

See the problem? We have God’s plan that is so clear. It is eternal, it is everlasting. It involves the land, it involves the seed, it involves the race.

All of these things fit into this unconditional covenant that we instituted in Genesis 15 when God alone walked between the pieces.

Here are some statements to give us an idea of how all this comes in complete contrast to what we’re reading and studying:

(Unveiling Islam: An Insider’s Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs by Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner)

“The most wretched person in the sight of Allah on the Day of

Resurrection and the worst person and target of His wrath would be the person who is called Malik al-Amlaak (the King of Kings) for there is no king but Allah.” (Sahih Muslim hadith 5339)
p. 114

Read Revelation 19 when the heavens open and we have the Savior, the Christ, the Messiah coming forth on a white horse. And written on the sides of the horse are “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

This is diametrically opposed to all of that. And we don't negotiate here. We can't. They're going to stick to their guns and if we're worth our salt, we're going to stick to our guns and the Word of God. So the conflict is going to issue into eternity when finally the Prince of peace, the Lord Jesus Christ comes to settle it.

So it's foolish for us to constantly think that we can be nice, we can be good, we can be kind, we can be accepting, we can be broadminded. And they're going to understand, they're going to appreciate it and they're going to join us. Actually, they're not. They are not going to completely destroy their whole theological framework, all the way back to Ishmael to the present day.

v. 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

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after you.

“I will establish my covenant”

How long is everlasting? Well it’s forever! It’s eternal. It goes even beyond time.

“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.”

He starts with the covenant because that’s the critical part. The institution of it was on His part and He’s saying, “When I walked between the pieces it was an everlasting thing. It’s not conditional, it’s not framed in time, it’s forever—the covenant that I’ve instituted.”

Now He’s got two more things to deal with. He has to deal with the LAND and the SEED. And as He speaks to him, He has to handle both of those things.

First of all, God’s covenant endures forever because He’s faithful and He does not change. So the covenant is there and intact forever.

Now He moves to the LAND in verse 8.

v. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you

and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

“The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession”

These people that are trying to go in there and tell us that we’re ugly and mean because we’re pro-Israel, this was given to them in the Abrahamic Covenant. It is their land by covenant, by right and a direct word from the Lord.

And so it is:

“an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

Can it be any clearer than that? Lots of people want to mess with that big time.

The longing of God’s heart is to be the God of His people, the Jewish race, the seed of Abraham.

“I will be your God.” That is the sum and substance of the whole covenant. “I will be your God.”

v. 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.

“Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you must keep my

covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.”

That sure sounds conditional.

One of the things we have to understand is that God, when He makes a promise, also has something that He desires or longs for to verify the fact that our heart is right and that we are loyal, that we are committed to the covenant.

What did He say in chapter 15? He said, “Abram believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.” So it was by faith and faith alone.

Now He’s coming along and He’s introducing something here that would be a mark of all the male population in the Jewish nation.

v. 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.

“This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.”

Does that mean that refusal to be circumcised keeps them from the blessings of the covenant? It sure does in the same way that disbelief or unbelief keeps us from the blessings of eternal salvation when we refuse to accept what God has

provided in the person of Christ.

God has given us two ordinances—baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Neither one of them has anything to do with the promise of our salvation. The minute we say that they do, we’re saying what man does affects what God promises as all God’s work, it’s all His doing.

But we can celebrate the ordinance of baptism and be buried with Him and raised to newness of life and fulfil Romans 10:9-10 that “if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” This is our testimony. It’s our declaration as we’re celebrating the ordinance.

In the same way we fulfill the longing of the Lord’s heart in the upper room when we take the bread and the cup to be reminded again of the horrible price He paid for our salvation.

That’s all circumcision is here. It is a badge of the covenant. It is a brand on His own.

There are several words that we can use to describe this, if it’ll help:

DESIGNATION—they’re set apart,

it’s SEPARATION,

it’s an indication of PURITY, and

it's an indication of POSSESSION by God alone.

So all of these words would only speak to one thing and that is by loyalty to the covenant, if they're a male descendant of Abram, and are to be circumcised.

Remember that it was also stipulated that circumcision be on the eighth day and that's why Christ had to be taken by Mary and Joseph to the temple on that eighth day to fulfil perfectly all of the requirements of the Law.

He concludes his remarks on the mark of those who are part of the blessings of the covenant.

v. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

“You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.”

What is the sign that we're a believer today? It's the indwelling Holy Spirit, isn't it? That's the badge, that's the mark. People are aware of the Spirit of God.

Galatians 5:22, 23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, self-control.

Listen to A. W. Tozer:

(The Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozer)

Let any man turn to God in earnest, let him begin to exercise himself unto godliness, let him seek to develop his powers of spiritual receptivity by trust and obedience and humility, and the results will exceed anything he may have hoped in his leaner and weaker days.

Any man who by repentance and a sincere return to God will break himself out of the mold in which he has been held, and will go to the Bible itself for his spiritual standards, will be delighted with what he finds there.

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That man has a right to say that. And he certainly lived it out in what he wrote and also in what he preached.

v. 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.

“For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised,”—that’s why Christ had to be taken to the temple on that eighth day.

“including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.”

v. 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.

“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.”

There’s the word again—“everlasting.”

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

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

In other words, the attitude to refuse is simply to say that they’re not going to have any part with the people of God, because the mark of the covenant is circumcision.

Ready? Here comes the hard part of this study, okay?

v. 15 God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.

“God also said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.’”

Abram, Abraham now legally, knows something’s up because Sarah has been brought into the equation.

“All I’m telling you is life begins at ninety and at ninety-nine, it’s really nice.”

Joni Eareckson Tada tells the story of one day wearing some big, beautiful earrings. They were her favorite pair. They were large and square. They had a smooth, shiny surface. While she was on the telephone, one of them fell off. When she backed up her wheelchair, it wasn’t on the floor. So she wheeled out into the hallway to look for someone to help her:

(Pearls of Great Price: 366 Daily Devotional Readings by Joni Eareckson Tada)

... immediately I felt a clunk-clunk. The gold earring was impaled on my tire. My friend plucked it off, but it was a mangled mess.

I asked a jeweler, “Sir, could you please make the crumpled earring look like this nice one?” He rubbed his chin and replied, “Lady, forget it. But I *can* make this one”—he pointed to the smooth earring—“look like your smashed one.” It was an option I hadn’t considered. After a few minutes of hammering, I had a unique designer original: a pair of crinkled gold earrings that reflected even more light than before! [And then she goes on to say—and I love her insight]

When God allows hammering and hurting, he is purposing to transform us into something new and different. Like those earrings, we are the same, yet poles apart. Best of all, we are better; we are closer to reflecting the light of Christ because of our weakness. The jeweler at the mall could turn a flawless earring into a mangled one, but only God can take a mangled life and change it into a life that reflects the flawless perfection of his Son, Jesus Christ. One day the hammering process will cease and we will perfectly reflect the image of our Savior.

(March 1)

We can feel sorry for them. They are a mangled mess. But God's changing their names and He's getting ready to tell them everything's going to be alright. The covenant is intact.

“God also said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.’”

v. 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.”

“I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her.”

“All the plans and suppositions that I had worked out for my teenager being the promised son and the inheritance of everything that I have has now gone up in smoke.”

“I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations;

kings of peoples will come from her.”

Every bit of that is foreign to his thought. He can't get attuned to what God is saying. All of his plans are gone! He never thought that this could ever be an issue.

(Abraham: Delay is Not Denial by Donald E. Anderson)

Poor Abraham—he heard those lines, and every single plan he had made exploded in his face. Every bit of the human wheeling and dealing he had fleshed out over the past thirteen years suddenly went up in smoke. He had been living on a false premise that Ishmael was the child God had promised, and for the first time since the sealing of the covenant he was forced to recognize his folly. Abraham had not even considered the possibility that God would work through his barren ninety-year-old wife to fulfill His word.

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And there's where we are after what he said when we get to verse 17.

v. 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?”

“Abraham fell facedown;”

This is the second time we've had him on his face. He's not

worshipping this time, he's laughing.

Now listen, this laughter is not a laughter of unbelief. He understands the covenant. What he's laughing at is the mess they've made of it and what God has in mind for the future.

Now, basically that's what he says.

“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?’”

A baby crib in a nursing home, who's heard of it?! Changing diapers in an assisted living facility, who's heard of it?!

Now the three a.m. feedings won't be that bad because we're up anyway. We can handle that part. He's cracking up and he's falling out. It's so funny to him. He can't get a handle on it.

v. 18 And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

“And Abraham said to God, ‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’”

Isn't it hard to give up our own plans? And our own way of doing and seeing things?

Even with all the evidence now, it's tough to give it up! But

every time we give it up, the Lord always has something so much better we're embarrassed that we hung on so long. We do that. We assume and we live like this and he still hasn't given up on it! And so:

“If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

His thoughts rapidly turn to this thirteen-year-old boy. He's had all of his hope in him. They've spent time hunting and fishing and building relationships. And now he's got to turn from him and turn to something totally, brand new. Something that he never really thought was possible.

MacLaren says, as he looks at this passage:

(The Expositor's Bible: The Book of Psalms-Volume I- Psalms I-XXXVIII by A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Left alone, without God's help, what can a man do but think and think, plan and scheme to weariness all night and carry a heavy heart as he sees by daylight how futile his plans are?

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(31 Days of Prayer: Moving God's Mighty Hand by Warren & Ruth Myers)

Simply to drop all our dreams and ambitions and preferences, and to have no mind about it at all, but be willing for God to shift us anywhere on life's

checkerboard, or bury us anywhere in life's garden, counting not our lives dear and loving them not unto death, gladly yielding ourselves for God to please Himself with, anywhere and anyway He chooses—that is rarely done.

If you are hesitant to drop your dreams and [ambitions and] preferences [and to have no mind about it all, but be willing for God to shift us anywhere on life's checkboard, or bury you wherever He wants. If you're hesitant to drop your dreams and preferences] into the loving hands of God, ask Him to work in you and make you willing (Phil. 2:13). Ask Him to nurture in His people everywhere the glad response of the hymn writer, "Ready to go, ready to stay, ready my place to fill. . . . ready to do Your will."

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This is the picture of someone who has the right to do that.

v. 19 Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him."

"Then God said, 'Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.'"

The Lord has some words about Ishmael, just like He did in our last study.

v. 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.

“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.”

Just like He had promised Hagar He would do.

v. 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”

“But”—big “BUT.”

There it is big time. When we see the word “But” in a verse, it’s a CONTRAST. It’s completely different from what has just been read.

CONTRAST:

“But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”

“Abraham, I’m going to make that ninety-nine-year-old man dance and celebrate like you never have before in your long-

legged life because your wife is going to have a child about this time next year.”

“And I’ve chosen to name him Isaac which means laughter, because you’re going to laugh every time you think about it. People a hundred and people ninety having little children.”

“But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”

Here is the picture.

Now when we take that and throw that against Islam, listen to what they say:

“But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”

(Unveiling Islam: An Insider’s Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs by Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner)

“When the Prophet got up at night to offer the Tahajud prayer, he used to say: ‘O Allah! All the praises are for you, You are the Holder of the Heavens and the Earth, and whatever is in them. All the praises are for You; You have the possession of the Heavens and the Earth. . . . Your Word is the truth And Paradise is true And Hell is true And all the Prophets are true; And Muhamm[a]d is true, And the Day of Resurrection is true. O Allah! I surrender [my will] to You; I believe in You and depend on You. And repent to You, And

with Your help I argue [with my opponents, the non-believers] and I take You as a judge [to judge between us]. Please forgive me my previous and future sins; And whatever I concealed or revealed. . . . There is none to be worshiped but you.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari hadith 2.21.221)
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The picture's quite clear. We don't negotiate.

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

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

We have eleven lessons that come out of our passage.

Lesson #1: Nothing significant happens, as far as God is concerned, while we're living in the flesh and out of fellowship with Him.

Lesson #2: God reveals Himself in such a way as to meet our needs. To Abram He is God Almighty.

Lesson #3: His power is always adequate to fulfill His purpose and to be faithful to keep His promises.

Lesson #4: God is always faithful to keep His promises when we die to ourselves and allow Him to take over and bear fruit through us.

Lesson #5: A death to self, precedes fruitfulness. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal” (John 12:24-25).

Lesson #6: We must give up our plans in the flesh so that the Spirit might fulfill His purpose in our lives.

Lesson #7: A name and a nature change accompany salvation. “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Lesson #8: Just because things are smooth and okay doesn't equal fellowship and progress spiritually.

Lesson #9: Sometimes it takes a long time for us to catch on to what the Lord is doing.

Lesson #10: God's promises are not affected by our failure.

Lesson #11: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand” (John 10:27-29).

Charles Spurgeon said:

(Morning and Evening by Charles H. Spurgeon)

How glorious is Jesus when the will is subdued, and sin dethroned!

p. 677

Arise, believer, and behold the Lord Jesus yoking the whole of His divine Godhead to the chariot of salvation! How vast his grace, how firm His faithfulness, how unswerving His immutability, how infinite His power, how limitless His knowledge!

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We don't have forever. We have to be serious about God's plan and purpose for our life so we go into eternity with great joy, that we ran well, we stayed true to the faith, and we walked in the Word of God, and we fell deeply in love with the Lord Jesus.

Father, thank You for Your word. We're grateful when we celebrate our love for each other we ask that the fruit of the Spirit—the real love, the agape love—will flow freely between us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

What You Need to Know About ABRAHAM: “God Is Faithful to Keep His Promises”

Study Number Five – Genesis 17:1-22

NOTES

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

v. 2 I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

v. 3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,

v. 4 “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.

v. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

v. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

v. 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.

v. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

v. 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.

v. 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.

v. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

v. 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.

NOTES

v. 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.

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

v. 15 God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.

v. 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.”

v. 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?”

v. 18 And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

v. 19 Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

v. 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.

v. 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”

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

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Genesis 17:1-22 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. How does the Lord reveal himself in verse 1 and what does He ask Abram do?

3. Summarize what the Lord tells Abram in the following verses.

4. What does the Lord promise in verse 6?

5. What does the Lord say to Abraham about Sarai, his wife, in verses 15 & 16?

6. How does Abraham respond to the promise in verses 17 & 18?

7. What does the Lord promise to Abraham in verse 19?

8. What message does the Lord convey to Abraham according to verse 21?

9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Nothing significant happens, as far as God is concerned, while we're living in the flesh and out of fellowship with Him.

LESSON #2: God reveals Himself in such a way as to meet our needs. To Abram He is God Almighty.

LESSON #3: His power is always adequate to fulfill His purpose and to be faithful to keep His promises.

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LESSON #5: A death to self, precedes fruitfulness. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal" (John 12:24-25).

LESSON #6: We must give up our plans in the flesh so that the Spirit might fulfill His purpose in our lives.

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