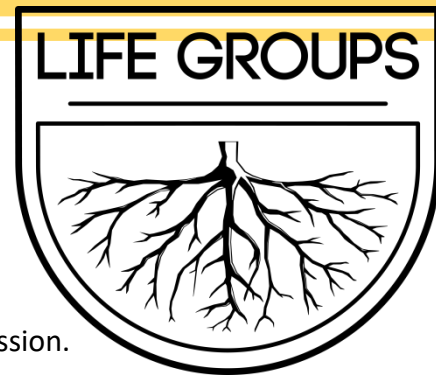


Genesis/The Covenant Confirmed/Chapter 17



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: When you find yourself in an uncomfortable or awkward situation, how are you most likely to respond? Do you try to flee? Do you clam up or shut down? Do you laugh?

The story of Abraham in Genesis gives us one of the best pictures of what faith in God looks like through the ups and downs of life. One of the reasons Abraham's example is so important for us to learn from is because he wasn't perfect. God promised to do amazing things in Abraham's life, but choosing to trust those promises was a struggle for Abraham. Through his story, we see that God makes promises to His children, and we can trust those promises, no matter how laughably impossible they seem. True faithfulness, birthed in us by the Holy Spirit, is perseverance with God through all seasons of life.

The events of Genesis 17 pick up 13 years after the birth of Ishmael, the son Abram bore to his servant Hagar when he doubted God's power to give his wife, Sarah, a son to be his heir. Thirteen years after Ishmael's birth, God again appeared to Abram when he was 99 years old (17:1). It was during this encounter that God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What insight, lesson, or observation from this weekend's message did you find to be the most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?
2. How did God describe Himself to Abram?

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).

Genesis—Beginning and Blessing God Himself and Abram (vv. 1–8)

If our God is El-Shaddai, the awesome, mighty God of this account, then our lives will live out the fullness of God's promises to us. What you truly believe about God is the most important thing in your life. Any thoughts of a God less potent than the God of Abram will shrink your soul and neutralize your faith.

Genesis—Beginning and Blessing God Himself and Abram (vv. 1–8)

Christians, it is the same for us. The way we live is determined by what we think of God. If our God is El-Shaddai, the awesome, mighty God of this account, then our lives will live out the fullness of God's promises to us. What you truly believe about God is the most important thing in your life. Any thoughts of a God less potent than the God of Abram will shrink your soul and neutralize your faith

3. What do you think God meant when He told Abram to be blameless?

This idea is built off of what we discussed with the previous question in regards to how we think about God. Like we discussed on Sunday, God calls us to a life of following God that results in walking before God in his sight and protection and being made whole by receiving his grace. We also talked about this idea from Psalm 23:

Psalm 23 NIV

A psalm of David. ¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

4. What is so significant about this covenant?

This was a covenant that was not just for Abraham but all of those that would put their faith in God as well and God gave them a way to show their commitment through the sign of circumcision. God's people could now show the rest of the world their commitment through this sign of the covenant.

Kent Hughes stated this idea well and compared it to the wedding ring as a sign:

“As a sign, circumcision functioned much as a wedding ring symbolizes commitment. The external sign signified a whole life commitment...For Abraham circumcision was an act of repentance and a sign of dependence upon God for the promise”

God also once again reminded those that were following Him that He will be their God and we see further reminders of this all throughout scripture.

Deuteronomy 7:9 (NIV)

⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

5. **What did God accomplish by waiting so long to complete His plan? What did He reveal about Himself?**

Abraham and Sarah were 99 and 89, respectively, when God told them they would have a son. They weren't exactly of childbearing or child-rearing age, a reality which Abraham found laughable (v. 17). But through Sarah's conception, God demonstrated His power over nature, and through her womb came a brand new nation, God's chosen people. God fulfilled His covenant promise in such a way that only He would receive the glory for it. There would be no question that God was behind the miracle of Isaac's birth.

6. **Why was God's promise to Abraham so extraordinary?**

God's promise to Abram was going to alter the course of his life and forever change his legacy. El Shaddai, God Almighty, changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude." God put His promise to Abraham on display. El Shaddai practically drew the promise on Abraham's forehead for all to see. In giving Abraham a new name, God was essentially telling people, "This man will become the father of many nations, or my name isn't El Shaddai." Abraham may have been old and his wife barren, but God Almighty had complete power and the final say over all circumstances. As Tony Evans asserts, God Almighty can do things we don't think he can do in ways we don't think he can do it.

Ultimately God was telling Abraham through this covenant that he was going to be His God which is the ultimate purpose.

7. **Now read Genesis 17:23-27. Although Abraham initially laughed at God in disbelief, how did he ultimately respond? What does this reveal about his faith?**

God alone was the engineer of Abraham and Sarah's destiny, and their attempts to go it alone paled in comparison to the grandeur of God's plan. God would be the one to bless them. God would be the one to give them the promised son, Isaac, and make their descendants as numerous as the stars. And God would be the one to receive every last bit of the glory. God's faithfulness and ability to do what He says overcomes all of our flaws and uncertainties.

Kent Hughes stated this well in his commentary:

“The absence of any correction for Abraham implied not that he lacked faith, but rather that his faith was limited. He was believing but his faith was pushed to the limits of credulity. Nevertheless Abrahams’ faith held.”

8. How can you show God you trust Him, even when His promises seem unbelievable? How can we encourage each other in this effort?

We get a great example in this instance from Abraham on how we can show God we trust Him, even when the promises seem unbelievable. At the end of this chapter and God establishing the sign of circumcision, God revealed more about the promises to Abraham. Then Abraham responded in faith and performed the signs of Circumcision with His entire household. The way we can show our trust is by being obedient to what God has commanded and promised.

When we come together, sharing those experiences of trusting in God are great ways to encourage other believers to trust God in their own life. When they see the acts of faith in others it encourages them to trust God in their own areas of their life.

Conclusion

It is in this context that God changes Abram’s name to Abraham, signaling a profound change in identity and course—a virtual resurrection. This event anticipates the work of Jesus Christ, who secures the blessings of the covenant for us and draws us into communion with Himself. Through Jesus Christ, God both calls and enables us to “walk before Him and be blameless.” It is a resurrection command, not one by which we earn God’s grace, but one by which we exhibit the resurrection power of God in us—our source of grace and life.

The believer’s children are set apart unto God. They will be the recipients of greater blessings than those outside the church, but they will also be held more accountable for their service to Christ (Luke 12:35–48). Are you raising your children to fear the Lord? Do you pray with them, read Scripture, and take them to worship? If you have children at home, make sure to do these things. If not, contribute time and resources to the educational ministry of your church.

PRAYER

Pray for a better understanding of God’s faithfulness. Thank God for the ultimate fulfillment of His promises—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Also pray that the Holy Spirit will help you learn to trust God’s promises and stand in amazement at what He does.



FURTHER STUDY



Romans 2:28-29 (NIV)

²⁸ A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

Colossians 2:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh^a was put off when you were circumcised by^b Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with h

Additional Resources

Devotionals-

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/walk-me-and-be-blameless/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/you-and-your-offspring/>

Articles –

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/place-law/>

Sermon-

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gods-covenant-with-abraham>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leLW7OrUTpQ>