

Introduction

1. Abram's relationship with God began in chapters 11-12 with God's call that he leave his home for a new life in a new land
2. This relationship is first referred to as a covenant in Genesis 15:18 which Dustin covered (READ)
3. What we have here in chapter 17 is a confirmation of the covenant and, in many respects, a deeper formalizing of it (in fact, while the word covenant was only used once in chapter 15, it's used here 13 times:
 - a. The covenant was established with conditions (17:1-6)
 - b. The covenant was an everlasting covenant (17:7-8)
 - c. The covenant was confirmed with a perpetual sign (17:9-14)
 - d. The covenant was dependent on the supernatural and sovereign work of God (17:15-22)
 - e. The covenant was responded to in faith (17:23-27)
4. One of the remarkable natures of God's covenant with Abram is how it reflects the new covenant we have with Jesus Christ; to help make this point and emphasis it this morning, I'm going to keep all of our takeaways until the end

A. God's covenant with Abraham was established with conditions (READ 17:1-6)

1. For the first time, God refers to Himself as El-Shadday (also pronounced El-Shaddai), translated as "**God Almighty**" by most translations (1a):
 - a. The first word is El which is "**God**", but there's been a lot of debate around the second word, Shadday, because the etymology (origin and history) of the word isn't known
 - b. Most translations render Shadday as "**Almighty**" because of its translation in the LXX and Latin Vulgate
 - c. It's almost always associated with prosperity, blessings, and even fertility which is certainly true in God's relationship to Abram
 - d. By referring to Himself as El-Shadday it would have served to remind Abram of God's promises as part of the covenant
2. Immediately after announcing His name, God laid out some expectations or conditions for Abram (and his descendants) as part of the covenant:
 - a. There's a debate as to whether the Abrahamic covenant was conditional or unconditional:
 - 1) An unconditional covenant is defined as one that had no expectations or conditions placed upon the other party in order for God to fulfill His promises (one example would be the Noahic covenant where no expectations were placed upon mankind)
 - 2) A conditional covenant is defined as one that had expectations or conditions placed upon the other party in order for God to fulfill His promises (one example would be the Mosaic Law where conditions were placed upon Israel)
 - 3) Most scholars claim that the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional because no expectations or conditions are mentioned in Genesis 12, 13, 14 or 15 and God is the only one to pass through the pieces of the animals when He established the covenant with Abram in 15

- 4) However, there are two conditions mentioned here in chapter 17 and we'll get to these in a minute
- b. How do we know these are conditions?
- 1) Verse 2 indicates these are conditions:
 - a) There's a conjunction at the beginning of verse 2 that the NASB leaves out, but most other English versions translate it as what's called a causal conjunction: "so that", "that", or "then"; only the KJV
 - b) The Hebrew verb translated as "**establish**", "**confirm**", "**make**" or "**setup**" is also in the cohortative mood which generally expresses will or desire, but can also indicate consequence; the NET translation notes on this verse say, "**the cohortative [in this case] indicates consequence. If Abram is blameless, then the LORD will ratify the covenant**"
 - 2) Later, in v. 14 God specifically states that if a descendant didn't meet the second condition he was to be "**cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant**"
 - 3) There are at least three other verses that suggest there were conditions to the covenant:
 1. When the Lord and two messengers appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18:19: "**For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.**"
 2. His statement to Abraham in Genesis 22:18: "**In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.**"
 3. His statement to Isaac in Genesis 26:5: "**all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.**" (Genesis 26:5)
- c. So, which is it? Was God's covenant with Abram unconditional or conditional? Was it dependent on God's sovereignty or Abraham's faithfulness?
- 1) My answer is "yes"
 - 2) One of the problems with theology is that it's not always easy to categorize something into either/or categories
 - 3) For instance, the debate over God's Sovereignty vs man's free-will; the two seem diametrically opposed to one another but yet the Bible teaches both
 - 4) I'm going to argue the same is true here: God's covenant with Abram had both unconditional and conditional elements to it
 - a) The unconditional nature of the covenant meant in an ultimate or universal sense, God would fulfill His promises to Abram and Israel as a nation independent of their faithfulness to the conditions (Paul alludes to this in Romans when he wrote of God's future eschatological plans for Israel)
 - b) The conditional nature of the covenant meant that only those individuals and generations that were faithful to the conditions would experience the promises and fulfillment (we see this throughout the OT when God refused to bless individual generations of Israelites for their disobedience, even kicking them out of the land)
- d. So what are the two conditions?
- 1) The first is that Abram was to be devoted to the Lord and walk in faithful obedience to Him:

- a) This is essentially what **“walk before Me, and be blameless”** means in v. 1
 - b) God wasn’t demanding sinless perfection (as none of us is capable of that), but rather what the Lord reminded Abraham’s descendants to do when they entered the land of Canaan (Joshua 22:5): **“Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”**
- 2) The second condition was to maintain the practice of circumcision (we’ll get to this in vs. 10-11)
- 3. So, we know what God expected of Abram, but what could Abram expect of God? (RE-READ 17:2 followed by 3-6):
 - a. God would **“establish”** His covenant with Abram: the Hebrew imperfect tense here suggests an ongoing or continual establishment (rather than a one-time event)
 - b. He would **“multiply”** Abram **“exceedingly”** which is obviously a reference to many descendants
 - c. He would make Abram the **“father of a multitude of nations”**; as assurance of this promise God even changed his name to Abraham (while it doesn’t literally mean “father of nations”, it is nearly identical to the word that does mean that, abraham)
 - d. These promises are repeated in v. 6 with the addition of **“kings that would come forth from”** Abraham
 - e. As we look throughout Israel’s history, we see how God has already made good on some of these promises, but also how Israel, at times, has not received the promises due to their disobedience
 - f. However, as we see in the Bible, God will ultimately fulfill all of them to Israel

B. God’s covenant with Abraham was an everlasting covenant (READ 17:7-8)
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- 1. The word **“everlasting”** is used twice in these two verses:
 - a. The Lord promised to be the God of Abram and his descendants **“throughout all their generations for an everlasting covenant”** (7)
 - b. He promised to give the land of Canaan to Abram’s descendants **“for an everlasting possession”** (8)
 - c. We also saw back in Genesis 13:15 that God promised Abram that He would give him and his offspring the land **“forever”**
- 2. Some argue that God’s covenant with Abraham is no longer in effect; it’s null and void and no longer everlasting because Israel broke the covenant with their disobedience and forfeited the promises; they argue that the Church replaced Israel and that God’s promises are now all spiritual
- 3. However, look at Deuteronomy 4:25:40 (READ):
 - a. In this passage and many like it throughout the OT, God warned individual generations of Israelites that if they obeyed the terms of the covenant they would receive the promises, but if they didn’t God would not only withhold the blessings but chastise them, even kicking them out of the land
 - b. But, many of these passages also speak of a time when Israel will return to the Lord in faithful obedience and receive all of the promises He made to Abraham:

- 1) Hosea told us this will be in the last days: **“Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their King; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days”** (Hosea 3:5)
- 2) Revelation 20 describes this as the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ

C. God’s covenant with Abraham was confirmed with a perpetual sign (READ 17:9-14)

1. As I mentioned earlier, this is the second condition of the covenant: circumcision
2. Every male in every household in every generation (whether a son, servant, or foreigner) would need to be circumcised by the 8th day or they were to be cut off from Israel for breaking God’s covenant
3. God instituted circumcision to serve as the sign of the covenant He made with Abram and his descendants and He expected that it be perpetuated throughout every generation
4. We’ll see in a minute how Jesus did something similar with the New Covenant

D. God’s covenant with Abraham was dependent on a supernatural and sovereign work of God (READ 17:15-22)
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1. Like He had done with Abram, God gave Sarai a new name as well:
 - a. While Abraham’s new name reflected both a change from his past and one of the promises God made to him (“father of a multitude”), Sarah’s new name simply appears to be a derivative of Sarai; both refer to a princess or queen
 - b. However, it may have served to reflect a new future for Sarah
2. One of the things that stands out in these verses is that the fulfillment of the covenant would require a supernatural and sovereign work of God:
 - a. 15 years earlier, Abraham and Sarah attempted to fulfill God’s promise through the custom of a barren wife providing a concubine to her husband who would then have children on her behalf
 - b. At this point, Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 90 which, even back then with the longer lifespans, was way past normal childbearing years; this explains why Abraham laughed and offered God an alternate solution (RE-READ 17:17-18)
 - c. God’s plan, however, was to fulfill His covenant THROUGH Sarah; in fact, this is so important that God repeats it THREE times in five verses:
 - 1) V. 16: **“...I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her”**
 - 2) V. 19: **“No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son...”**
 - 3) V. 21: **“...whom Sarah will bear to you...”**
3. The Bible makes it clear that this could only happen as a direct result of God’s supernatural and sovereign work:
 - a. Genesis 18:11: **“Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.”**
 - b. Genesis 21:2: **“So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.”**
 - c. Hebrews 11:11: **“By faith, even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised”**

E. God's covenant with Abraham was responded to in faith (READ 17:23-27)
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1. When God first called Abraham in Ur, he responded in faith by leaving his home, family, and relatives and heading to a land he knew nothing about
2. We see that same faith here expressed through obedience; immediately after God confirmed His covenant and promises to him, Abraham responded in obedience by circumcising every male member of his household, and getting circumcised himself
 - a. Something that would be easy to overlook here is the emphasis the text places on the thoroughness and completeness of Abraham's obedience:
 - b. It first mentions Abraham circumcising Ishmael his son, then his servants, every male in his household
 - c. It even stresses that this was **"in the very same day"** and that he did **"just as God had said to him"** (23)
 - d. It then repeats that Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised in vs. 24-25
 - e. And again in v. 26
 - f. And, for good measure, in v. 27 it mentions again that all the men of Abraham's household were circumcised
3. According to Hebrews, Abraham's obedience was ultimately an act of faith:
 - a. Hebrews 11:8 says that by faith he obeyed God by going to the land of Canaan without knowing where he was going
 - b. Verse 9 says by faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise
 - c. Verse 17 says by faith he was tested when he obeyed God by offering up Isaac

Takeaways

1. I mentioned at the beginning of our teaching that I was going to save our takeaways until the end, and this was because I want to emphasize the parallels between God's covenant with Abraham and the New Covenant we have in Jesus
2. Just as the Abrahamic covenant was established with conditions, so was the New Covenant:
 - a. The conditions of the Abrahamic covenant were essentially devotion and obedience
 - b. The conditions of the New Covenant are similar in that Jesus called us to love and obey Him:
 - 1) John 14:23: **"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.'"**
 - 2) I'm not saying that we can earn salvation through works, but rather that when we become part of the New Covenant through faith in Jesus, there is an expectation that we love and obey him if we expect to receive ALL the blessings that come that in this life and the next; I also do not intend to imply that we can lose our salvation when we fail to live up to these conditions
3. Just as the Abrahamic covenant was everlasting, so is the New Covenant:
 - a. There is a long list of blessings and promises that we receive as part of our faith in Jesus and the New Covenant, but the greatest is eternal life
 - b. John wrote in his first letter, **"This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life"** (1 John 2:25)

- c. Hebrews 9:14-15: **“how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”**
- 4. Just as the Abrahamic covenant was confirmed with a perpetual sign, so is the New Covenant:
 - a. The sign of the covenant that God gave Abraham was circumcision; it was to remind Israel that they were in a covenant relationship with God and it was something that was to be repeated through every generation of Israelites
 - b. Jesus did something similar by giving us a sign to remind us of the New Covenant that we have with Him; it's the Lord's Supper and we are to repeat it (READ Luke 22:15-20)
- 5. Just as the Abrahamic covenant was dependent on the supernatural and sovereign work of God, so is the New Covenant:
 - a. God's promises to Abraham were dependent on God supernaturally opening Sarah's womb at His appointed time and giving them Isaac
 - b. Likewise, there would be no New Covenant if God did not send His Own Son, at His appointed time, to supernaturally be born of a woman, suffer, be crucified, and then supernaturally raise Him from the dead
 - c. The New Covenant also results in a supernatural work in us: the greatest example of this is regeneration
- 6. Just as the Abrahamic covenant was responded to in faith, so is the New Covenant:
 - a. Abraham responded to God's call and the covenant in faith; he believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness
 - b. In the same way...we enter into the New Covenant with Jesus by grace through faith