

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 17

ABRAM HAS IMPROVISED YET GOD REMAINS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISE AND PLAN. GOD WILL BLESS ABRAM AND HIS HOUSEHOLD (INCLUDING ISHMAEL!) GENESIS 17 TAKES PLACE 13 YEARS AFTER GENESIS 16 WHICH ENDS WITH THE BIRTH OF ISHMAEL (16:15-16). IN MANY WAYS GENESIS 17 IS A CHAPTER OF CULMINATION OF ALL GOD HAS PROMISED ABRAM AND SARAI UP TILL NOW - AND IT WILL POINT US TOWARDS THE DAY OF FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S WORD IN THEIR LIVES, A DAY THEY HAVE BEEN LONGING AND WAITING AND LOOKING FOR.

GENESIS 17:1-8

GOD APPEARS TO ABRAM WHO IS NOW 99 YEARS OLD. ABRAM WAS FIRST CALLED BY THE LORD WHEN HE WAS 75. A LOT OF TIME HAS PASSED AND A LOT HAS TRANSPIRED IN THOSE YEARS.

AT LAST CHECK OF THE DETAILS OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT, WE KNEW THE FOLLOWING:

GOD'S PROMISE (GENESIS 12:2-3)

- 1 - I (GOD) WILL MAKE (FROM) YOU A GREAT NATION
- 2 - I (GOD) WILL BLESS YOU
- 3 - I (GOD) WILL MAKE YOUR NAME (ABRAM) GREAT
- 4 - YOU (ABRAM) WILL BE A BLESSING
- 5 - I (GOD) WILL BLESS THOSE PEOPLE WHO BLESS YOU
- 6 - I (GOD) WILL CURSE THOSE PEOPLE WHO CURSE YOU
- 7 - THROUGH YOU (ABRAM), ALL OF THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED

GOD'S PROMISE [EXPANDED] (GENESIS 13:14-17)

- 8 - I (GOD) WILL GIVE YOU (ABRAM) ALL THE LAND YOU SEE (N, S, E & W)
- 9 - I (GOD) WILL GIVE THIS LAND TO YOUR (ABRAM'S) DESCENDANTS FOREVER
- 10 - I (GOD) MAKE YOUR (ABRAM'S) DESCENDANTS INNUMERABLE, AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH

GOD'S PROMISE [CLARIFIED] (GENESIS 15:1-21)

- 11 - THE DESCENDANTS WILL BE BIOLOGICALLY FROM ABRAM.
- 12 - (ABRAM'S) DESCENDANTS INNUMERABLE, AS THE STARS OF THE SKY
- 13 - THOUGH ABRAM'S DESCENDANTS WOULD HAVE TRIALS (ENSLAVED AND OPPRESSED), THE LORD WOULD RESCUE THEM
- 14 - I (GOD) WILL GIVE YOUR (ABRAM'S) DESCENDANTS THE LAND FROM THE BORDER RIVER OF EGYPT TO THE RIVER EUPHRATES.

GENESIS 17 ADDS SOME TREMENDOUS THINGS TO OUR ALREADY AMAZING LIST

GOD'S PROMISE [COVENANTED] (GENESIS 17:1-8)

15 - YOU (ABRAM) WILL BE FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS

16 - I (GOD) WILL MAKE YOU (ABRAM) VERY FRUITFUL

17 - KINGS SHALL COME FROM YOU (ABRAM)

18 - I WILL BE YOUR GOD AND THE GOD OF YOUR DESCENDANTS AFTER YOU

THERE IS SO MUCH TO GRASP FROM THESE VERSES. GOD CALLS ABRAM TO WALK BEFORE HIM BLAMELESS AND KEEP HIS COVENANT. GOD IS GOING TO BLESS AND KEEP AND PROVIDE FOR ABRAM - AND HE'S NOT JUST GOING TO HAVE SOME FRUITFULNESS BUT BE "EXCEEDINGLY FRUITFUL" (V. 16).

GOD ALSO CHANGES ABRAM'S NAME TO ABRAHAM. NAME CHANGES ARE COMMON IN SCRIPTURE TO SIGNIFY MOMENTOUS OCCASIONS OR LIFE CHANGES. (FOR EXAMPLE: JACOB → ISRAEL, CEPHAS → PETER, SAUL → PAUL). THE MEANING OF THE NAME ABRAM IS "EXALTED FATHER" AND ABRAHAM MEANS "FATHER OF A MULTITUDE". THIS CHAPTER IS ALL ABOUT GOD CONFIRMING HIS COVENANT PROMISE TO ABRAHAM IN PERSONAL AND SIGNIFICANT WAYS. THINK ABOUT IT, EVERY TIME ANYONE CALLS TO ABRAHAM, THEY ARE REMINDING THEM OF THE "FATHER OF MULTITUDES" PROMISE. ANYTIME HE INTRODUCES HIMSELF TO SOMEONE, THE SAME IS TRUE.

ONE THING THAT IS WORTH NOTING IS THE INCLUSION OF THE PROMISE OF "KINGS" TO COME FROM ABRAHAM (17:6). THIS HASN'T BEEN A PART OF THE PLAN UP TILL NOW. ABRAHAM WILL NOT JUST HAVE MANY CHILDREN AND DESCENDANTS, BUT NATIONS AND KINGDOMS (AS OPPOSED TO JUST TENT DWELLING BEDOUINS). AND THIS PROMISE IS AN "EVERLASTING COVENANT". IT IS IN THIS CHAPTER THAT WE SEE SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PROMISES FROM GOD TO ABRAHAM (AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN GENERAL) IN GOD'S REDEMPITIVE PLAN - WHAT JESUS CALLED "THE KINGDOM OF GOD". THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM IS PLANTED HERE WITH ABRAHAM WHO WILL HAVE "KINGS" COME FROM HIS FAMILY LINE.

GENESIS 17:9-14 - THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT

GOD TELLS ABRAHAM TO CIRCUMCISE EVERY MALE IN HIS FAMILY. THE WORD "CIRCUMCISE" MEANS TO "CUT AROUND" AND YES, IT IS THE FORESKIN OF THE PENIS WHAT GOD MEANS ABRAHAM TO "CUT AROUND" (BLESS HIS HEART). GOD COMMANDS THIS TO BE DONE FOR EVERY MALE IN ABRAHAM'S CURRENT HOUSEHOLD AND TO BE DONE FOR ALL AND EVERY MALE THAT IS BORN IN THE GENERATIONS TO COME - ON THE 8TH DAY (V. 12). IF ANYONE IN ABRAHAM'S HOUSEHOLD DOES NOT DO THIS, GOD WILL CONSIDER THEM NOT PART OF THE COVENANT! (THEY WILL BE "CUT OFF" FROM THE PEOPLE, PER 17:14).

WHILE THIS IS LIKELY A FAMILIAR RECORD AND PRACTICE FOR THOSE OF US FAMILIAR WITH THIS BIBLICAL STORY AND THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM, CAN WE PAUSE FOR A MOMENT AND THINK ABOUT HOW WILD THIS MUST HAVE BEEN FOR ABRAHAM TO HEAR TO BEGIN WITH AND AS A PRACTICE IN GENERAL?! ABRAHAM WILL DO THIS (V. 23-27) WITHOUT QUESTION AND WITHOUT DELAY. AMAZING. WE'LL TALK MORE ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT AS WE CONCLUDE TODAY BUT THERE ARE SOME GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK IN THE MEANTIME:

Q - WHY DO YOU THINK ABRAHAM FOLLOWS GOD'S COMMAND REGARDING THIS PRACTICE? AND CAN YOU IMAGINE THE CONVERSATION HE HAD TO HAVE WITH THE OTHER MALE ADULTS IN HIS HOUSEHOLD! WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS IF GOD ASKED YOU TO? WHAT WOULD BE YOUR MOTIVATION OR REASONING?

GENESIS 17:15-22

SARAI'S NAME IS CHANGED TO SARAH (WHICH MEANS "PRINCESS"). THOUGH ABRAHAM HAS KNOWN THIS ENTIRE TIME THAT GOD WAS PROMISING HIM DESCENDANTS, AND HAD MADE IT CLEAR IT WAS THROUGH SARAH EVEN AS RECENT AS CHAPTER 16, HE CAN'T HELP BUT LAUGH WHEN HE HEARS GOD RECONFIRM THIS TRUTH. HE IS ALMOST 100 AND BARREN-NO KID SARAH IS 90! HE EVEN OFFERS GOD THE OPTION TO JUST DO THE WHOLE THING THROUGH ISHMAEL (THIS SUGGESTION DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE A REBELLION OR REJECTION BUT A PURE HEARTED IDEA).

GOD PLAINLY STATES THAT ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS AND THE BLESSING OF THIS AMAZING COVENANT WILL COME THROUGH HIM VIA SARAH - PERIOD, END OF STORY. THOUGH GOD WILL BLESS ISHMAEL, ITS THROUGH ABRAHAM'S SON "ISAAC" (WHICH MEANS "HE LAUGHS") THAT THE EVERLASTING COVENANT WILL FLOW. AND GOD AT LAST TELLS ABRAHAM THAT THIS IS ALL GOING TO HAPPEN SOON - IN FACT IT'S ONLY ABOUT A YEAR AWAY. WOW.

GENESIS 17:23-27 - ABRAHAM CIRCUMCISES HIMSELF AND ALL HIS HOUSEHOLD

99 YEAR OLD ABRAHAM, 13 YEAR OLD ISHMAEL AND ALL OF THE MALES OF HIS HOUSEHOLD ALL CIRCUMCISED. THIS IS A VERY PERSONAL, SIGNIFICANT AND SACRIFICIAL SYMBOL FOR ALL THE MEN OF ABRAHAM'S HOUSE. IT WILL REMIND THEM OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS, BUT IT SEEMS LIKE THEIR ACT OF OBEDIENCE SPOKE TO GOD ABOUT THEIRS TOO.

LET'S RETURN TO LOOK AT THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CIRCUMCISION AGAIN AS WE FINISH GENESIS 17. GOD INSTITUTED CIRCUMCISION AS A "SIGN OF THE COVENANT BETWEEN" THE LORD AND ABRAHAM (GENESIS 17:11). SIGN OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO INSPIRE FAITHFULNESS ON THE PART OF THE RECIPIENT OF THE RECEIVER OF THE "SIGN". WHAT THE LATER GENERATIONS FAILED TO REALIZE WAS THAT HAVING THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT DID NOT MEAN YOU WERE EXEMPT FROM FOLLOWING THE TERMS OF THE COVENANT. THE LATER GENERATIONS (ESPECIALLY THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO CLASHED WITH JESUS) FELT THAT BECAUSE THEY WERE CIRCUMCISED, THEY WERE GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE - REGARDLESS THE CONDITION OF THEIR HEARTS. THEY FORGOT THAT THE HEART OF THE COVENANT WAS NOT ABOUT THEIR PENISES, IT WAS ABOUT THEIR HEARTS.

DEUTERONOMY 10:16 - "SO CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART, AND STIFFEN YOUR NECK NO LONGER.

DEUTERONOMY 30:6 - "MOREOVER THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART AND THE HEART OF YOUR DESCENDANTS, TO LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, SO THAT YOU MAY LIVE.

JEREMIAH 4:3-4 (NLT) - THIS IS WHAT THE LORD SAYS TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM: "PLOW UP THE HARD GROUND OF YOUR HEARTS! DO NOT WASTE YOUR GOOD SEED AMONG THORNS. O PEOPLE OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM, SURRENDER YOUR PRIDE AND POWER. CHANGE (*CIRCUMCISE*) YOUR HEARTS BEFORE THE LORD, OR MY ANGER WILL BURN LIKE AN UNQUENCHABLE FIRE BECAUSE OF ALL YOUR SINS.

ROMANS 2:28-29 (NLT) - FOR YOU ARE NOT A TRUE JEW JUST BECAUSE YOU WERE BORN OF JEWISH PARENTS OR BECAUSE YOU HAVE GONE THROUGH THE CEREMONY OF CIRCUMCISION. 29 NO, A TRUE JEW IS ONE WHOSE HEART IS RIGHT WITH GOD. AND TRUE CIRCUMCISION IS NOT MERELY OBEYING THE LETTER OF THE LAW; RATHER, IT IS A CHANGE OF HEART PRODUCED BY GOD'S SPIRIT. AND A PERSON WITH A CHANGED HEART SEEKS PRAISE FROM GOD, NOT FROM PEOPLE.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CALLS THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN A BELIEVER THE "SIGN" OF THE NEW COVENANT. IT IS THE EVIDENCE THAT WE HAVE ENTERED INTO THE COVENANT THROUGH JESUS AND AWAIT THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISES OF GOD. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS EVIDENCE THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL AND REMINDS OF US GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO FULFILL WHAT HE HAS SAID. **HOWEVER, THE RECEIVING OF THE SPIRIT DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE WILL REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE END.**

MANY CHRISTIANS MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE THE BIOLOGICAL DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM MADE. JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE WAS CIRCUMCISED DID NOT MEAN THEY WERE FAITHFUL TO THE COVENANT. JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE RECEIVES THE SPIRIT DOES NOT MEAN THEY WILL BE FAITHFUL TO THEIR COVENANT. NO MORE THAN WEARING A WEDDING RING GUARANTEES YOU WILL BE FAITHFUL TO YOUR SPOUSE.

INSTEAD, LIKE A WEDDING BAND, BOTH CIRCUMCISION IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT AND THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW COVENANT REMIND US OF GOD'S PROMISE AND HIS PASSIONATE COMMITMENT TO KEEPING HIS VOW TO US. KNOWING THAT YOUR SPOUSE IS GOING TO BE FAITHFUL NO MATTER WHAT MAY COME AND NO MATTER WHAT YOU'LL FACE CERTAINLY FUELS A LOVE FOR THEM AND AN INSPIRED FAITHFULNESS ON YOUR PART.

AND BE SURE, THE SPIRIT FOR THE CHRISTIAN IS NO PHYSICAL OR SYMBOLIC SIGN ALONE - THE SPIRIT BRINGS TO THE BELIEVER A SUPERNATURAL EMPOWERMENT TO HELP US BE THE FAITHFUL ONES WE LONG TO BE!

EVERY SINGLE TIME ABRAHAM SAW THE "SIGN" OF THE COVENANT HE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO REMEMBER THAT THE LORD IS GOD ALMIGHTY! FAITHFUL AND POWERFUL TO COMPLETE THE WORK HE HAD PROMISED. EVERY TIME THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS AT WORK IN YOUR LIFE OR THROUGH THE LIFE OF ANOTHER BELIEVER OR AT WORK IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST IT IS A SIGN THAT GOD IS POWERFUL AND LOVING AND FAITHFUL. WE DO NOT NEED TO WONDER IF GOD WILL BRING ABOUT HIS WORD AND PROMISES IN OUR LIVES - THE SPIRIT AT WORK CONFIRMS THIS OVER AND OVER AGAIN!

WHAT A TIME TO BE ALIVE! RATHER THAN SIMPLY HAVING A PHYSICAL REMINDER OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO US, WE HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKING AND MOVING IN OUR LIVES EVERY DAY! WE ARE ENABLED AND INSPIRED AND EMPOWERED TO BE GOD'S PEOPLE AND STAY FAITHFUL TO HIM KNOWING HE SURELY IS FAITHFUL TO US!