



THE ETERNAL PROMISES OF GOD

INTO THE WORD

LESSON 7

- WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS LESSON:
 - The promises of God are eternal
 - God makes everlasting covenants
- BIBLICAL THEMES:
 - Covenant
 - Faith
- SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES:
 - Genesis 17
 - Genesis 22
 - Hebrews 11:17-19
- FOR FURTHER STUDY:

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Introduction:

God's Covenant

A covenant is a sacred agreement between two parties. It is an agreement that is not meant to be broken, and is therefore not meant to be entered into lightly. Covenant is often accompanied by ceremony, signifying its sacred importance. Marriage is an example of such a covenant, and making a public declaration to raise your child in accordance with God's laws and principles is another. The breaking of a covenant is detrimental to the parties involved and has resounding negative consequences. In this lesson we will look at the covenant God makes with Abraham. We will see the solemnity with which the agreement is entered, and the ceremonial ritual that accompanies the commitment between God and Abraham. God, however, in his infinite mercy and wisdom, is mindful of humanity's weakness and becomes the guarantor of His own covenant with Abraham.

Into the Word:

1. The Promise of Many Descendants

After Abraham had separated from Lot and prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God spoke another promise to Abram:

- Genesis 13:14-18 (NLT)
¹⁴After Lot had gone, the LORD said to Abram, "Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. ¹⁵I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession. ¹⁶And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted! ¹⁷Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you."
¹⁸So Abram moved his camp to Hebron and settled near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. There he built another altar to the LORD.

God promised Abram that his offspring or seed would be so great that it would defy number. However, after many years, Abram and Sarai remained childless. It seemed as though Abram began to doubt God's promises:

- Genesis 15:1-6 (NLT)
¹Sometime later, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."

² But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. ³ You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir." ⁴ Then the LORD said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir." ⁵ Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!" ⁶ And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

The Lord reiterated His promise to Abram. However, Genesis 16 narrates how Abram and Sarai took matters into their owns:

- Genesis 16:1-16 (NLT)

¹ Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. ² So Sarai said to Abram, "The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her." And Abram agreed with Sarai's proposal. ³ So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.) ⁴ So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who's wrong—you or me!" ⁶ Abram replied, "Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit." Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away. ⁷ The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. ⁸ The angel said to her, "Hagar, Sarai's servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress, Sarai," she replied. ⁹ The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority." ¹⁰ Then he added, "I will give you more descendants than you can count." ¹¹ And the angel also said, "You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means 'God hears'), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress. ¹² This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives." ¹³ Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?" ¹⁴ So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi (which means "well of the Living One who sees me"). It can still be found between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵ So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.

2. God's Covenant of Circumcision

Despite his disobedience, when Abram was 99 years old, God renewed his covenant with Abram. This is one of the most important passages of scripture we see in the Word of God. It is with the covenant of circumcision that Abram is given his new name, Abraham.

- Genesis 17:1-14 (NLT)

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. ²I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants." ³At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him, ⁴"This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of a multitude of nations! ⁵What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. ⁶I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them! ⁷"I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God." ⁹Then God said to Abraham, "Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. ¹⁰This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. ¹¹You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased. ¹³All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. ¹⁴Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant."

Abraham's new name, given to him by God, signified the great purpose to which God had called him. Abram meant High Father, but Abraham means the father of Many Nations. By accepting his new name, Abraham was showing his faith in God and his submission to him. After a marriage in our culture, a woman traditionally takes her husband's surname to signify oneness. It is a symbolic gesture of showing that the woman is submitting herself to her husband, allowing her life to be identified with his. Coming in contact with the Lord always brings a positive change. Occasionally, someone's name would change after an encounter with God. (Abraham, Sarah, Israel, Peter, Paul). As our husband, the Lord promises to give us a new name (he gives us His name).

- Isaiah 54:5; Genesis 48:16; Isaiah 62:2; Isaiah 45:4; Ephesians 3:15; James 2:7

The token of Abraham's covenant with God was to be circumcision. Any male not circumcised was not part of the promise. Keeping the covenant of circumcision was permanent sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. Abraham and all the men in his household were circumcised. The covenant of circumcision incorporated a "new name". This is illustrated in both Abraham and Sarah's name change and the taking of the male child's name on the 8th day when they are circumcised.



Scripture Reading Response and Analysis

- What was the consequence of not being circumcised? (Genesis 7:14)

- When did a Jewish male child receive his name? (Luke 1:59, Luke 2:21)

Circumcision of the Heart

The Bible also speaks of a new type of circumcision, the circumcision of the heart. This is also referred to as the circumcision of Christ. Read the following scriptures:

- Deuteronomy 30:6
- Jeremiah 4:4
- Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:26-27
- Romans 2:29
- Colossians 2:8-15
- Galatians 3:14, 26-29



Scripture Reading Response and Analysis

- What connections can we make between the "fleshly" circumcision of the Abrahamic covenant and the circumcision of the heart?

- Consider the Colossians 2:8-15 scripture. How might baptism be considered the "circumcision of Christ"?

3. The Child of Promise

As the scripture states, Sarai too receives a name change: Sarah, meaning “princess”. God also blesses Ishmael, son of Abraham and Hagar, but once again He declares that the child of promise will come through Sarah, and it is with this child, Isaac (meaning laughter) that God will establish his “promise and pledge”. (Gen 17: 19-21)

Despite the disbelief of Abraham and Sarah dramatized in their laughter at God’s words when he declares that Sarah will conceive in her old age, God keeps his promises.

- Genesis 21:1-7 (NLT)

¹The LORD kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. ²She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. ³And Abraham named their son Isaac. ⁴Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. ⁵Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. ⁶And Sarah declared, “God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. ⁷Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!”



Scripture Reading Response and Analysis

- What can we learn about God's character through these scriptures?

- Have you ever laughed at the promises of God?

- Have you ever seen a seemingly impossible promise from God to come to pass?

Sarah is never able to overcome her jealousy toward Hagar and Ishmael, and Genesis 21: 8-21 narrates the banishment of Sarah’s bondwoman and her son. God, however, once again shows mercy to Hagar and does not recant the blessing He has spoken over Ishmael. However, the consequences of the disobedience of Abram and Sarai in attempting to bring God’s promises to fruition in their own way resound to this day.

- Hebrews 11:17-19 (NLT)
¹⁷ It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac,¹⁸ even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted."¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.
- Genesis 22:10-14 (NLT)
¹⁰ And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. ¹¹ At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"
"Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!"
¹² "Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son." ¹³ Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴ Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the LORD will provide"). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

Despite God's startling request, Abraham did not falter in his trust of the Lord. Abraham exercised obedient faith, confident that God had a plan. Abraham had demonstrated his utter submission to God and His covenant. No longer did he "laugh" at the promises of God as he had in the past; no longer did Abraham attempt to execute God's promises in his own way. Abraham had grown and matured in his knowledge and relationship with God. The story of Abraham and Isaac clearly demonstrates that the promises of God are eternal.