

Genesis 17

It is interesting within a couple of verses of each other, in the book of Genesis, in the later part of chapter 16 and the beginning of chapter 17, Abram goes from being 86 to 99. As far as we know, there was 13 years between these revelations where God promises the land of Canaan to Abram and his offspring. And, it has been 30 years since God first promised Abram an heir, and that his offspring would receive the land where they now dwell. Actually, that could go a long way in explaining why Abram and Sarai seem to have had their doubts about God's promise; why they have, at times, shown a lack of patience when it comes to God's promise. Now, we don't know for sure if it has been 13 years since Abram had a good sit down with God, but we don't have any information to the contrary. So, if there is that much time in between these revelations, one can easily see where the concerns and worries of the world, around Abram and Sarai, could cloud out God's wonderful promise to him, and to the generations of his family that would follow him. And by the way, Sarai and Abram have still not been blessed with any children between them as God seemed to indicate in previous conversations. And, they are quickly coming to the realization, that under ordinary circumstances, Sarai and Abram are getting way too old to expect to bear children. So, God once again appears to Abram. The way God appears and the way Abram reacts seems to confirm the idea that it has been a while since God appeared to Abram. God says to Abram, "I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless." And God's purpose is right out front to Abram. God is before Abram to confirm the covenant about the promised land, and the great numbers of offspring that Abram will have, is still valid. God tells Abram that he will be the father of many nations. And then He changes Abram's name to Abraham. Abraham means, "the father of many." So he goes from Abram which means, "exulted father" to the name Abraham, which means "the father of many," And the scripture says, "The father of many nations." Abram is changing from, "the one chosen by God," into, "the one chosen by God to be the Father to the nations." God also gave Sarai a new name. Up until now, she had been referred to as Sarai, which means "My Princess". God changed her name that day to Sarah, which is very similar. Rather than, "My Princess," it is just, "a princess," or, "woman of high standing." Again, Sarai is transformed from "My princess," or, "God's chosen," to "a Princess" with the purpose of joining with Abraham to be the leader of the nations. And remember, renaming people that God intends to use for His divine purpose becomes a pattern. Changing the name also happened with Jacob who was changed to Israel, and Saul who was changed to Paul.

So, one part of this chapter is to affirm God promise and God's covenant with Abraham; the promise is that the land between the Nile and the Euphrates will belong to the offspring of Abram. And, it will be those offspring who come from Isaac, and not Ishmael that will be heirs to this covenant. God tells Abraham about Abraham's son born to him by Sarah. That son, Isaac will be the seed of this great nation that God has promised. Now Abram again falls face down before God, and the scripture says that he laughs and says to himself, "Will a son be born to a man who is 100 years old? Will Sarah, at the age of 90, bear a child?" And then, having come to the reality that a son between Sarah and him is simply not possible, Abraham makes a suggestion. Abram says, "Can't You just extend Your blessing to Ishmael". God says that Ishmael will have God's blessing, but in fact, in spite of Abram's and Sarai's

doubts and impatience, Sarah will bear a son. And he shall be called Isaac, and Isaac will be the seed of this covenant. God is telling Abraham to remember, "I am not limited by the things that limit you. You are, but I am not. You must learn to expect My miraculous presence in your journey. So just listen and watch and you will see, that My promise is sure. I am still going to be true to My promise." God tells Abraham. "I will make you fruitful. Kings will come from you." Just remember that God is able. The other thing that God talks about in Chapter 17 is circumcision. He tells Abraham that, "Every male among you shall be circumcised." All the generations that follow Abraham should follow that directives for circumcision. Now, long books have been written about circumcision. We will not be exhaustive about circumcision. But circumcision is the cutting away of flesh. Circumcision is a symbol of cutting away of the flesh; cutting away of the sinful nature within us. Abraham's people took this step as a symbol of their commitment to get rid of the way of the flesh and embrace the way of the Spirit, God's way of love. Even in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy Chapters 10 and 30, it says that God will circumcise the heart. Cutting away the ways of the world, to make room in people's heart for the love and the glory of God. And the symbolism of circumcision proceeds from its identity in the Old Testament right into the New Covenant of the New Testament. The symbolism in circumcision has commonality in the act of baptism; and in symbolism of the cross. On the cross, Christ's flesh was broken so that we can take a part in the death of the flesh, in order that, in Christ, we might all be made alive. Just like the people of Abraham, we are called to surrender the way of flesh, the sinful nature, in order to make room for the way of the Spirit, the way of God's love, and the way of Jesus' call to love and forgiveness. The symbolism of circumcision is found in Jesus' words to His disciples. Lay down your nets, the way of the world, the way of the flesh, and follow. Pick up your cross, and so join in the breaking of Christ's body, so that you might have a part in the new life of the resurrection of Jesus. Pick up your cross and follow me. Allow God to circumcise your heart, so that you might be washed as white as snow. The circumcision of the Old Testament was done by the priest, but the real circumcision it done by God. The act of baptism is done by the pastor, but our heart is cleansed by God. The end is the same; surrendering our hearts over to God. Paul says in Galatians 6:15, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. What counts is the new creation." That is, the new creation procured for us by Jesus Christ. And the new creation is what binds our hearts together. We could say so many more things about circumcision, the cross, baptism, and the new creation, but our time is short. Suffice it to say, we are all children of God from Abraham and Sarah to you and me. God's children are called to love in His name.

Let us pray...