



An Adventure of Faith: Walking With Abraham

1. We're into our 7th week of our study on: **An Adventure of Faith: Walking with Abraham**

- remember, this study isn't really so much about Abraham as it is the GOD of Abraham
- we're going to learn a lot from Abraham's life, but we want to focus on the hand of God at work through the life of Abraham
- Next week we'll study *Genesis 18-19: Don't Underestimate the Power of God - the Promise of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom*

2. Today our study is from **Genesis 17: Sometimes We Just Don't Get It OR How Many Times Does God Have to Tell You?**

Better title: *The Gracious God Who Helps Us Even When We Struggle to Understand His Plan*

3. When I think about the Abraham's story within the context of the larger story of Genesis, we must remember that Abraham is a key player in the promise of a seed in Gen. 3:15.
4. When I think about the Abraham Story itself, here were some of the more significant points
 - 1) God's gracious choice of a man whose name God would make great!
 - 2) Abraham's responses of OBEDIENCE and FAITH to God's commands and His promises
 - 3) Continual "*Threats*" to the Promises of God (Famine, Pharaoh, Success, War, their own plans to help out God) – much like we do today
 - Abraham believes God
 - Still worships God (13:4, 13:18)
 - Still Trusts God (chapter 15 and 15:6 in particular)
 - At the same time, he offers God all kind of help (sister story, offer to Lot of which land he wanted)
 - 4) Ratification of the Covenant
 - ⇒ Affirmation that a son will come through Abraham's body. Remember the question of a servant as the heir?
 - ⇒ Reminder of the certainty of the promise (picture of the covenant – only God walked through the pieces)
 - 5) Developing their own means whereby the promise of children will be fulfilled!
 - ⇒ Somewhat ironically their plan "worked." Abraham did father a child through Hagar.
 - ⇒ Boy did that cause some problems in that home!
 - ⇒ We should notice at this point that God has not revealed to Abraham that the "seed" would come through Sarah even through there have been some major hints in that direction (The episode in Egypt especially)

- ⇒ We were left with the question....will Ishmael really be the son of promise? Did God rescue Sarah, provide victory over the kings, ensure Abraham was on his land, so that Abraham and Sarah could finish the job?

[Please turn to Genesis 17]

5. I would like to introduce our lesson in chapter 17 by thinking about this issue: *How do you respond when you think you have the answer and are proven wrong?*
- I don't know about you, but there are many times in my life where I have been wrong. On some occasions another person actually let me know.
 - It is not overly pleasant is it? Don't like it do you?

[you could move from the trivial (like what was your wife wearing on her first date) to the more serious (like when you made a decision that hindered your family, or made it difficult, for them to grow in Christ)]

6. That raises the question:

INPUT: What steps can I take to respond in a godly way even when I am shown to be wrong?
 [Various answers – could include things like (reminding me that I am not omniscient! Taking the time to listen carefully, etc.)]

7. In Genesis 17, we are going to see that God corrects Abraham's thinking by providing the key piece of the puzzle, that we know, that Abraham did not. The question is....How will Abraham respond?

I would like us to consider first:

I. Our Gracious God Provides What We Need to Know When We Need To Know It

Verse 1 provides a brief editorial on the circumstances.

- We are now 13 years removed.
- The Bible is silent regarding this time.
- This silence may be our first clue that Abraham and Sarah actually believe that God has filled his promise --- Abraham has a son from his own body (Abraham's views are expressed in vv. 17-18 which we will see shortly)!
- Genesis 17 is one of the rare chapters in the Bible where God does the vast majority of the talking. In the first 22 verses God explains 3 crucial pieces of information to Abraham.

A. God Reiterates his Promises (vv. 1-8)

I just love these first eight verses. Despite Abraham's failures what does God do?

- He reminds Abram of his great promises for him
 - o This in turn is a reminder of the reality of the covenant of chapter 15 (God alone walked through the pieces showing that He is the covenant keeper)

We should notice the following characteristics of this speech:

- #1. *Those promises are reiterated with words like "multiply," "exceedingly," and "everlasting"*
- God was not going to give Abraham a thimble of seed, a thimble of land, or a thimble of blessing; God was going to give him the 5 gallon bucket!
- #2. *God Changes Abram's name to Abraham to show that he would be a father of nations.*
- Not only will descendants come from his body, but multiple nations
 - Kings will be his descendents giving the picture that Abraham is royalty.

#3. *His promises are good forever!*

- Not only does the promise go to Abraham, but to his descendents as well.
- God will be the God not just of Abraham, but of his children too.

I mean what could possibly be more encouraging than to hear God say these things?

- It would be so easy for Abraham to be discouraged. He has spent 24 years in Canaan where others are still on his land, and where he has 1 son from his own body.
- Yet God reminds him once again that his promises are still good.
- In fact, they are even heightened as now he will be the father of nations and of kings as his name suggests.

As an aside: Does the NT reiterate its promises? You betcha!

- I think of passages like Ephesians 1-3, 1 Peter 1, Colossians where God repeats himself to us. Where we are reminded of certain things on multiple occasions lest we let our thoughts / dreams dwell on the wrong things.
- Just like in this speech, there are times when God takes a concept and develops it so we not only get the big picture, but we get the details as well (church body life from Ephesians 2 to 1 Corinthians!)

When you read the Scriptures, doesn't the constant reminder of the promises help to alleviate those doubts, those times that you want to help out God a bit, and those times that you are discouraged in your walk with Christ?

After 13 years of silence on this issue, God reiterates his promises. He also

B. Explains Abraham's Responsibilities

#1. *Abraham will have to be like Noah in that he must walk before God and be blameless.*

- With Privilege always comes responsibility
- Speaking of the NT, that sounds familiar

#2. *Abraham must also be circumcised, along with all who are part of his house (vv. 9-14)*

- At first, this stipulation may seem a bit odd. I tend to think circumcision itself is a evidence for the existence of God --- What man in his right mind would come up with that plan?
 - Short hair, long hair, color your hair, no drinking wine, something other than that!
- But God may be making a very important point here. God wanted a physical reminder not only that they were different, but he wanted that reminder in a place that shows his people that He would fulfill his promise of children and the ultimate seed of 3:15.
- In Gen 17:1 – God says he is El Shaddai (God Almighty)
 - Did they really believe that El Shaddai could take a barren women and give her children?

In the NT, could God Almighty send his son born of a woman to be the fulfillment of the seed of Gen 3:15 and the promise of Abraham?

Galatians 3:14 – “in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

- In the NT, circumcision of heart is a concept related specifically to one's view of Jesus Christ – this issue is no longer circumcision of the body, it is circumcision in the heart.

- Those who have faith that God did send his son, that he died and rose again on the third day are the real “sons of Abraham”

C. God Explains that the Promise will come through Sarah (vv. 15-22)

It is here that God reveals for the first time that the promise will come through Sarah. To this point in the story Abraham still believes that Sarah is expendable in that she is not the means of fulfillment.

When Abraham discovers that it is Sarah who will be the mother of nations and kings, Abraham laughs!

- He is amazed because God is blowing his mind. He is 99 and she is 90, how on earth can those two reproduce?
 - By this time in human history life spans were down in the low 100s (except for Abraham who was promised a long life)
- Abraham believes that Ishmael is the ‘descendent from his body’ (see Gen 15) and he appeals God for his son (v. 18)

God’s plan however, is that Sarah will bear a son (by this season next year) and it will be this son that is the son of promise.

- In keeping with God’s promise of blessing on Abraham, Ishmael is blessed.

We see the gracious God providing the right information at the right time. Abraham knows of the blessing, but it is not until now that he learns it is through Sarah. In the midst of trusting God, Abraham’s assumptions are often wrong.

- This time, God reiterates his promises, explains Abraham’s responsibilities, and reveals the plan for the promised seed some 25 years earlier.

II. Our Gracious God expects Immediate Obedience

I have been rather amazed that throughout the whole Abraham story there are few comments of rebuke for Abraham. That does not imply full-scale endorsement for all his actions, but it does remind us of the Gracious God we serve.

While God provides great grace, he also expects us to obey what we know.

- Now that circumcision is on the table, circumcision is expected

Abraham Responds with Immediate and Unquestioned Obedience

We started this lesson thinking about our responses when we are wrong. Abraham thought Ishmael was the son of promise, even asked if he could be. What does God tell him?

- Abraham you are WRONG. I protected Sarah and kept her with you because you NEED her! I am not going to use cultural norms --- I am going to show you that I am El Shaddai (God Almighty!)
- Abraham pouts, complains, and gets ticked off at God for not telling him earlier, right?

He obeys (v. 23, 26) on the VERY SAME DAY.

- No matter that it hurts (See Gen. 34 for a discussion on that score)
- No matter that he is like 100 years old!
- No matter who they are in the house and the position that they hold
- Everyone gets circumcised just like God said!

INPUT – If this is the same kind of response God wants from us, then why do we struggle with it?

Various answers

Conclusion

I believe thinking about these concepts is valuable in and of itself. After all,

1. How many of you know the plan for your life for the next 20 years?
 - God will give you what you need to please him when you need it.
 - Today has enough trouble of its own!
 - So God is not only gracious in that he does not overwhelm us, but he gives it when we need it.
2. When I am proven wrong, do I respond with obedience or with grumbling and complaining?

Ending Lessons

I wanted us to walk away from Genesis 17 reminding ourselves:

- ❖ That God is Gracious God who gives us what we need when we need it
- ❖ A God that reiterates his promises again and again because he knows the weaknesses of the human heart and mind
- ❖ Reminded by the fact that sometimes we are going to be proven wrong. In those occasions, you need to be respond like Abraham --- with obedience!

Study Notes

The Gracious God who Helps us Even When We Struggle to Understand his plan

Introduction

How do you respond when you think you have the answer and are proven wrong?

That raises the question:

INPUT - What steps can I take to respond in a godly way even when I am shown to be wrong?

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The question is....How will Abraham respond?

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Ending Lessons

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- ❖ We serve a God that reiterates his promises again and again because he knows the weaknesses of the human heart and mind
- ❖ We are reminded of the fact that sometimes we are going to be proven wrong. In those occasions, you need to be respond like Abraham --- with obedience rather than excuses!

