

Genesis 17 – The Abrahamic Covenant – Sermon Outline

Intro: God's covenant with Abraham is His covenant with us, now fulfilled in Christ.

Need: If you are in Christ, you are not merely children of God, but children of Father Abraham.

Theme: God's covenant with Abraham proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. God promises to bless Abram and his offspring in God's land forever.
2. God signifies His promises with the covenant of circumcision as an everlasting covenant.
3. God fulfills His promises in Christ, who was circumcised at the cross for Abraham's offspring.

I. God promises to bless Abram and his offspring in God's land forever.

A. The promise begins in Genesis 12, believed by Abram in Genesis 15:6, and signified in Gen. 17:

1. Abram is 75 years old in Gen. 12, now 99 here in Genesis 17. Abram at 75 years was in Haran, where his father Terah had taken him. Terah dies, and Abraham, as commanded by God, journeys toward Jerusalem, heads for the Promised land, even as Christ is doing in our sermons on Luke.
2. Gen. 12 foreshadows and serves as a type of God's deliverance from hell/Egypt. Abram goes there during a famine, God plagues Pharaoh for desiring Abram's wife (who said it was only his sister), but Pharaoh sends him out to avert the plague, having given Abram riches; "plundering the Egyptians".
3. These themes are repeated with Joseph rising to power in Egypt, saving from famine, etc., and of course Moses, who faces off with Pharaoh, God sends the plagues, The Israelites, now numbering in the millions, are set free, and plunder the wealth of the Egyptians, Ex. 12:35-37.
4. This points to the great and final Exodus in Christ, out of the pits of sin and hell, into heaven itself.
5. Christ will redeem from Satan's domain people from every nation, as God promises to Abraham.

B. Gen. 13-14, Abram has to rescue righteous Lot from wicked Sodom, & God's priest Melchizedek comes with a meal of bread and wine, calling to mind communion with Christ at the Lord's Table:

1. Melchizedek, meaning King of Righteousness, is said to be King of Salem (Jerusalem), peace.
2. Bread & Wine=Communion with God, ministered by God's priest (Melchizedek/Christ), giving a Kingdom of righteousness and peace to His people where God has defeated all enemies, 14:18-20.
3. Hebrews tells us Christ is an everlasting priest after the order of Melchizedek, to whom Abram tithes.
4. Gen. 12:1-3, the LORD tells Abram to go into His land to make Him a great nation to bless Abram and curse his enemies, which is already being fulfilled in Genesis 13-14. This, beloved, is the Gospel!

C. Gen. 15, Abram wonders how he will be made a great nation as promised in Gen. 12 without offspring:

1. Eliezer his servant would be his heir without children. But God tells Abram he will have an heir from his own body and will multiply him as the stars in heaven, & Abram believes this, Gen. 15:4-6.
2. God credits Abram's faith as righteousness, for Abram/his wife are old & past years of childbearing.
3. This faith must persevere; God shows that He will keep His promises, having Abram perform this cutting ritual of animals in Gen. 15, with the LORD's presence passing between the pieces.
4. This shows God will fulfill His promises to Abram, but only after Abram's descendants will suffer in Egypt for 400 years; God will judge them (hence the animal halves, as Pharaoh's army was drowned and scattered on the seashore) and lead them out by His presence (thus the smoking oven/burning torch, picturing God's presence of cloud by day, fire by night, leading Israel through the wilderness into the Promised Land under Moses, the very land that Abram is presently standing on).
5. These all foreshadow Christ, who leads us by His Word and Spirit out of sin and into heaven/glory.

- D. Gen. 16, 10 years pass, and Sarai/Abram's faith wane as they still have no children as God promised.
1. Sarai says since the LORD has restrained her from bearing children, for Abram to go into her maid, and raise up offspring/a seed through her. Abram conceives and has Ishmael with Hagar the maid.
 2. Of course, tensions rise between Hagar and Sarai, Hagar flees, God promises provision for Hagar.
 3. Abram is 86 when Ishmael is born, then another 13 years pass when we come to Genesis 17.

II. God signifies His promises with the covenant of circumcision as an everlasting covenant.

- A. Gen. 17, the promise is again confirmed yet expanded; Gen. 12, Abram will be a great nation; now in Gen. 17, God renames him Abraham, meaning father of many nations. The promise expands/abounds!
1. In Gen. 17 the LORD appears to Abram and tells him to obey him in all righteousness, be blameless, and he makes the covenant between him to multiply and bless him to be father of many nations.
 2. God always purposed to have a worldwide, multi-national people for Himself who are righteous.
 3. His kingdom of peace & righteousness, seen already with Melchizedek, comes through Abraham's line, to Christ, & all who are in Christ by faith. Faithlessness/unfaithful generations breaks the chain.
 4. Abraham's faith ebbs and flows, listening to his wife Sarai "take" Hagar, forbidden fruit, even as Eve told Adam to "take" the forbidden fruit. But after 25 years, finally Isaac is born, miraculously, out of a dead, dried up womb of Sarah, even as Christ came miraculously by the Spirit's power to virgin Mary.
- B. 17:6-9, The theme of being fruitful and multiplying for God's glory in God's land to rule and reign, the dominion mandate, is continued through Abraham's line, God's seed, not the seed of the Serpent.
1. Isaac was chosen, not Ishmael, as Jacob not Esau will be chosen later, despite parental desires.
 2. The Abrahamic covenant is an everlasting covenant that covers all the earth and gives all of God to all of His people in full, and extends to all their children, to all their generations, forever.
 3. Thus Eph. 6:3, Paul applies the covenant promises to the young children of Israel to all Christian children, to honor the 5th commandment so that things go well for them & they live long on the earth.
 4. Rom. 4:12-13 makes much the same point that the sign of circumcision isn't the root of the matter, circumcision of the flesh is not the essence of the covenant, but merely its sign.
 5. Heart circumcision is the essence, the life, the blessing, the fullness. Water baptism without Spirit baptism, likewise, is but the sign & seal but not the very life, promise, fullness, though the life, promise, and fullness belongs to all who receive the sign, to be received inwardly by faith.
 6. God promised to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world, not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith, Rom. 4:13.
- C. 17:10-14, physical circumcision is the sign of all that God is promising to Abraham/His offspring.
1. By circumcision God's people are identified with the Lord, and He with them. The males were circumcised as heads of homes, throughout all generations, including bought foreign slaves.
 2. 14, the one who is found uncircumcised is cut off from the community, from God and His people. Further, that person, that child even, would be regarded as a covenant breaker.
 3. Baptism of covenant children today matters, even as circumcising covenant children mattered.
- D. 17:15ff., Abraham laughs, later Sarah laughs & lies about it, Gen. 18:12, yet both are counted faithful.
1. Mustard seed faith, and the grace and blood of Christ. While Abraham wants Ishmael to be blessed and the covenant promises realized in him, this was not God's plan or purpose.
 2. Isaac, meaning "he laughs", will be the one. The Lord will have the last laugh.

3. And laughter of joy and gladness will issue forth when the promised son comes, Isaac, who will be figuratively crucified on stacks of wood by his father Abraham in faith in the LORD's provision.
- E. The covenant is "established"/realized in Isaac, not Ishmael, V. 21, but that does not mean the covenant was not made with Ishmael as well.
1. V. 23 Abraham, in obedience, circumcised all the male children in his house, including Ishmael. The covenant made, and the covenant established, or realized in the heart, are two different things.
 2. Covenant children today, who have received water baptism, are expected, as raised faithfully for the Lord by parents/church, to profess faith and have a genuine, saving faith by God's grace.
 3. We know poor parenting/shepherding can squander these promises of God to us and our children.
 4. God's covenants are always conditional, upon faith, and parents must faithfully raise their children for the Lord. That begins with giving the covenant/Gospel sign, then circumcision, now baptism.
 5. We baptize our children as Christians, raise them as Christians, with an eye toward faith and repentance in Christ for salvation throughout all their life, justification and sanctification.

III. God fulfills His promises in Christ, who was circumcised at the cross for Abraham's offspring.

- A. We have that circumcision of flesh through the cross-circumcision of Christ, who was cut off both in receiving the sign of circumcision as a child, but at the cross the reality of that, bearing God's judgment.
1. United to Christ we have received the true circumcision made without hands.
 2. We have circumcision in Christ, and now in Christ, too, we have what was not yet poured out on the O.T. saints, the outpoured Spirit, along with its sign of water baptism.
 3. But remember, the Spirit could not be poured out until Christ was circumcised, cut off at the cross.
 4. There He was made sin for us, so that we could be made alive in Him, filled with His Spirit. To have His Spirit is to have both circumcision and baptism, inwardly, truly, salvation forever.
- B. Ultimately, in Galatians 3:16 we come to see that the promised seed of Abraham was Christ, and then all who are in Him, by faith, receive the promised blessings that flow from Christ, the promised seed.
1. Christ inherits the earth, the nations. Indeed, Christ as He is ascending says to His apostles, "*all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me, go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing...and teaching them....*" (Mt. 28:18-19).
 2. Gal. 3:5-9 tells us that what we are reading in Genesis is the Gospel. The true sons of Abraham, the real descendants, are those who have faith. God will justify the Gentiles by faith, and so in Genesis we have the Gospel preached when it says to Abraham "in you all the nations shall be blessed."
 3. We are blessed, through God's covenant promise to Abraham with the accompanying sign/covenant of circumcision (now baptism for us), by faith, just as Abraham was blessed by faith. **Gal. 3:9, "So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham."**
 4. The agent of all these blessings is the H.S. who is promised to God's people to fulfill all righteousness, to be the power by which man is redeemed, united to Christ, grafted into Him, & filled with the fruit and gifts of the Spirit to live in righteousness and promote God's Truth and peace.
 5. But the Spirit can only be poured out to indwell man after Christ has redeemed us from the law's curse, by becoming a curse for us on the tree of the cross, so that the blessing of Abraham can come to the Gentiles/nations in Christ Jesus, to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith, Gal. 3:10-14.
 6. Now the covenant of circumcision sealed the promises of the Gospel, and ultimately even the forward looking promise of the outpoured Spirit after Christ atoned.

7. Children of Israel, as babies, were given the sign of this Gospel covenant. The outward sign has now changed from circumcision to water baptism, but both point to the same inward realities, heart circumcision and Spirit baptism, Col. 2:12ff.

C. Look at our text, Gen. 17:7, this Gospel covenant is made between Abraham and His descendants after them, in all their generations, to the 1000th generation, as an everlasting covenant.

1. That is why Abraham didn't merely circumcise all the male children alive that were with him, but each generation circumcised their children, for all are part of the covenant, & that covenant is everlasting.
2. It is still going, now through the mediation of Christ, who has poured out His Spirit from on high after shedding His blood, thus the sign has changed from bloody circumcision to bloodless baptism.
3. But the promises are one, for we have only one Gospel, foretold in Abraham, fulfilled in Christ. If you are Christ's, by faith, you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise, Ga. 3:26-29.
4. **Note that you are not Christ's seed, but Abraham's.** It is one covenant. If the new covenant were brand new or fundamentally different from the covenant of circumcision, how can we be Abraham's seed? Wouldn't we be Christ's seed only? How could the covenant with Abraham be everlasting?
5. But Christ Himself is the Promised Seed of Abraham, and in Christ we are seeds of Abraham as well.
6. God's covenant with Abraham is everlasting. The outward sign changes, the inward reality endures.

D. Indeed, the Gospel cannot be divorced from baptizing covenant children. Consider Gen. 18:17-19:

1. *"And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that **he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.**"*
2. How will the nations of the earth be blessed in Abraham? By believer's children being taught/commanded down through the generations to keep the covenant, doing righteousness/justice.
3. Now, more importantly, when will this be fully realized? In the N.C. era, for only then does Abraham go from a mighty nation, Israel, to all the nations of the earth being blessed in Christ with His Spirit.
4. The outpoured Spirit is everything. Christ's work is applied by the Spirit, to redeem and sanctify us.
5. The Spirit's indwelling especially enables us to raise our children for the Lord through generations.
6. So fathers and mothers, your most important work is being a godly father and mother. You make disciples of all nations by discipling your own children, in the home, in a faithful church, etc.
7. No investment or endeavor is as great as getting married, having children, & raising them for the Lord, day in and day out, year in and year out, looking in faith to God's covenant promises for them.

IV. **CONCLUSION:** Scripture tells of the joy of fathers & mothers when their children are walking in the Lord.

- A. Beloved, sacrifice all for that. Better to be poor and needy in body but full with faithful children. Read the word, sing the word, live by the word, all before your children and for your children.
- B. Prioritize the Church and its fellowship and the means God blesses there to further nurture yourself and your children to serve Him and build up His kingdom, and God will fulfill the covenant promises to you.
- C. May we like Abraham see from our line nations leavened for the Lord, serving Him, kings who lead nations in the light of God's holy Word & will, establishing justice, goodness, peace, and holy love.
- D. See that God's timing is not ours. It will not come when we want or even how we want. But it will come.
- E. If we persevere, He will give what He has promised – He will give us all, with Satan subdued under us.
- F. He gives us Christ's blood, His Word, and His Spirit, His covenant promises, to serve Him. Let us pray.