

Scripture Reading: Genesis 17:1-9

“1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Jehovah appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

8 Also I give to you & your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." 9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

10 This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; 11 and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. 13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." 15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."”

"God Gives Abram a New Name"

It is good to be back at the pulpit here at Church of the King and I bring you warm Christian greetings from the Saints at Reformation Covenant Church in Oregon City! It is also a blessing to be here at our new pulpit and I want to extend a hearty thank you to all those who made the transition in my absence! Your service was much appreciated and it was a job well done!

When last we were here in the Book of Beginnings we covered chapter sixteen in a single sermon dealing with the warnings it presents about doing the Lord’s work in the power of the flesh rather than trusting the Spirit of God for His strength and good timing. We will spend at least three Lord’s Days on chapter seventeen because here again the Lord establishes His covenant with Abraham, a theme that carries all the way through the Bible and is much discussed by the Apostle Paul when it comes to understanding the work of Jesus.

Lord willing next week we will see how this chapter forms the center of a very long section here in Genesis running from the call of Abraham at the beginning of chapter twelve to the birth of Isaac at the beginning of chapter twenty-one. Over these three weeks my plan is to consider how God gives both Abram and Sarai new names and gives His people the sign of circumcision.

This morning we will consider God’s coming to Abram which we are told in verse one is about thirteen years after the birth of Ismael. “1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Jehovah appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

It is likely, based on the hope that Abram later places in Ismael, that he and Sarai had settled back into their normal lives after the turmoil with Hagar and were accepting of the fact that God was going to fulfill His promises to Abram through this lad. Jehovah announces Himself as God Almighty, commands Abram to walk before Him perfectly and repeats the covenant promises: This must have come as quite a shock to Abram's system so his response is not really a surprise...

3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him,..."

It is interesting to note here that Abram does not ask any questions as he has in the past and that God does not lift him up as we have seen in other places... Abram is not bowed down seeing himself as a sinner in need of forgiveness, but as created one who is now in the presence of God Almighty, showing proper reverence to God and willing to listen to what He has to say.

So before we move on to understand Abram's new name and the significance of the covenant I think there are a couple of applications we should consider right here at the beginning. What would you say if I told you that this week God wanted you to walk before Him & be blameless [or perfect]?

Well the truth is that this is exactly what we are commissioned to do each and every week!

➤ So, how did you all do?

Well, what if I told you that I did? Must have been a great vacation!

Seriously, I would like you to consider this: Last week I was commissioned and sent forth just as you all were and now I am back a week later: Throughout this week I strove to serve God in the power of His Spirit and confessed any known sins as the week progressed and was very pleased to hear once again the proclamation of my forgiveness from Mike this morning! Thus I have walked before God this week and now stand before Him blameless because of the work of Jesus!

Listen to how the Apostle Paul presents this concept of walking before God at various places in the Book of Romans... At 6:4 he says, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

At 8:1 he says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but [walk] according to the Spirit." [I.E. they are blameless]

At 8:4 Paul says again, "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but [walk] according to the Spirit."

At 13:13 he says, "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy."

I could do the same with Ephesians and Colossians but I think you get the picture: God wants us to walk before Him all the days of our lives and we can do so in a blameless manner if we always remember to bring our sins and trespasses to the foot of the cross!

Perhaps Paul summarizes this important truth best in the 2nd chapter of his letter to the Saints at Ephesus...

Ephesians 2: "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

The other application that I want to quickly touch on is Abram's posture. Abram did not verbalize his willingness to listen to God Almighty, but demonstrated his humility with a bodily action.

Gordon Wenham put it well in his commentary on Genesis when he said: "Here Abram in a gesture more powerful than words, shows his humility before God and his willingness to listen."

We often talk about how we communicate with 'body language' as much as with our words because it is important! *[Wilkins example of taking out the trash]* We have used various movements of our bodies in worship here at Church of the King over the years.

- And with our new facility we get to add a new one for those who are willing and able: Kneeling at our time of confession.

All along we have stood for the call to worship and to hear God's Word being read: We have been seated at the Table as we have a meal with Jesus and we have raised our hands when it is appropriate in lifting up our praise as we are commanded in the Psalms. Many of us also use our hands to show our willingness to hear and receive God's blessing in the benediction that God gives us at the close of our service.

- Kneeling for our time of confession will be new, perhaps awkward at first, but important none the less.

All of these 'body movements' are an important part of our worship and should be a part of the instruction that we give our children... They will often do these motions long before they fully understand what they mean...

- But then who among us is not learning more and more about what they mean!?

So Abram is reverent and humble before God with both his silence and his posture and Jehovah goes on to renew the covenant that Abram had heard before...

3b "and God talked with him saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 Also I give to you & your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." 9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations."

- Now over the next two weeks we are going to flesh out many of the details about these covenant promises and how the Apostle Paul relates them to the life and work of Jesus.

For this morning I want to just give a quick overview as something for you to ponder in the coming weeks...

- But my focus will be on the importance of Abram receiving a new name.

God has been making various promises and covenants with Abram since chapter twelve with more and more details given along with the impressive illustrations and demonstrations which we have studied in past weeks.

There are three general categories...

- Abram will be the father of many descendants
- Abram will be the father of nations or Kings
- Abram will possess great lands.

As we think about these three categories, we should see that Abram had to believe each in faith at that time, we should see each fulfilled in history, we must see how each fulfilled in Jesus and finally we see all three being fulfilled today as the Kingdom of Jesus grows to fill the earth.

- Abram had to trust God in faith at that time, because his wife was barren giving him no descendants, he had no title and owned no land!

We see all these promises fulfilled in history as Abraham does have many physical descendants from Ismael, Isaac and even the children of Keturah. In history we will see many nations and kings come from Abram, with the twelve tribes from Jacob, the twelve nations from Ismael and others, again from the children of Keturah. We will see Abraham's descendants conquer the land of Canaan and have it grow into the Kingdom of Solomon.

As we shall see in detail next week the Apostle Paul shows how all of these promises have their true fulfilment in Jesus when He comes as the true Seed of Abraham, reigns as the King of Kings and is shown to be the Creator of all the earth.

And finally we have all of these covenants being carried out in history today:

- Paul tells us in Galatians three that those who have faith in Jesus are true children of Abraham so his descendants continue to multiply.
- The members of the Body of Christ are referred to as priests and kings who are reigning with Jesus.
- And we have been commissioned to bring all the nations of the earth under the feet of King Jesus.

Now there are, and certainly have been over the years, MANY ways to interpret what all of these covenant promises mean...

- But I will try to make the case in the coming weeks that this brief summary is how the New Testament reveals they are to be understood.

For this morning I will conclude by considering the importance of God giving Abram a new name.

- Names are important in the Bible!

The concept of names is not just an Old Testament focus because to my surprise the word 'name' is used almost two hundred times in the New Testament! This could be an entire sermon series but I will try to stay focused. In verse five we read, "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations."

- Let's begin here with Abraham and the other Patriarchs.

God gives Abram a new name: Abram means honored or exalted father and Abraham means the Father of a multitude: God is promising that Abraham will be the father of MANY nations and thus the new name. It is interesting to notice that God gives names to all of the first three patriarchs: Abram gets his new name Abraham from God here; God commands Abraham and Sarah to name their heir Isaac; and again we will see God give Jacob a new name, Israel, later in Genesis.

Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, made note of the fact that once Abraham's name was changed, you never see him referred to as Abram again while in Jacob's case both his new and given names are used interchangeably. That is something we will have to consider when we study the life of Jacob!

- In giving Abram a new name, God is not just looking at the immediate descendants we will see from his children and grandchildren, but his impact down through history!

As we will see next week, his most important heir will be THE Seed, Jesus and to Him all the nations of the earth will one day belong.

Thus John Calvin says of Abram's new name, "Abram was not called the father of many nations, because his seed was to be divided into many nations; but rather, because many nations were to be gathered together unto him. A change also of his name is added as a token. For he begins to be called Abraham, in order that the name itself may teach him, that he should not be the father of one family only; but that a progeny should rise up to him from an immense multitude, beyond the common course of nature."

There is power in the giving of a name and this is something that we see carried over into the New Testament where Jesus gives Simon a new name Peter, the rock and where Saul of Tarsus becomes Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles.

At the beginning of the Gospel accounts we see God telling Zacharias to name his son John and of course Joseph is given the name of God's own beloved Son: Jesus!

The Angel tells Joseph, "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Joseph is told that this will fulfil the Old Testament prophesy which said "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

And of course when Jesus asked the disciples who He was, Peter responded with the answer that Jesus said came from His Father, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God."

Thus it should not surprise us to find almost two hundred references to Jesus Christ in the New Testament... But we also have dozens of places where the reference is to Christ Jesus so it is important to remember that Christ is not the last name of Jesus as we would see commonly in our modern circles.

I am called John Stoos, but it would be strange to say Stoos John.

- The reason for this is the simple fact that Stoos is my last name and not a title.

We also tend to put the titles first as it the case when we read Christ Jesus.

We would say Dr. Smith or Governor Brown. When I say Governor Brown no one thinks I have exchanged Jerry for a new first name governor.

Governor is his title and I can properly say Governor Jerry Brown or Jerry Brown the Governor.

Thus we must remember that Christ is the title given to Jesus by the Father and it simply means Messiah or Savior, the one promised from the time of the fall in the Garden who was to come to save His people from their sins!

So it is proper to say Jesus the Messiah or Jesus Christ and/or The Messiah Jesus, or Christ Jesus.

- We should always be conscious of this when we are reading or hearing the Word of God!

And the name of Jesus is very important because John summarizes the purpose of his Gospel account by saying, "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

And the Apostle Paul makes an even stronger case when he declares to the Church at Rome: "6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ...

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Abraham was given his new name and called to be the father of nations and that calling was fulfilled with the coming of his seed, Jesus: And it is the NAME of Jesus that we are to be proclaiming to a waiting world as Paul explained to the Church at Philippi:

Philippians 2: "5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Communion Meditation: Romans

"15 So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."