

Chapter 17 – “A Chapter of Speeches”

- I. Vv 1-2 God's expectations of Abram
- II. Vv 3-8 God's commitment to bless
- III. Vv 9-14 God's expectations of Abraham
- IV. Vv 15-16 God's commitment to bless
- V. Vv 19-21 God's commitment to bless

(Abraham speaks only 2X; once to himself in 17 and once to God in 18)

Major speech by God to Abraham about the need to take action ringed by speeches of promises!

Read Genesis 17:1-2 (God's Expectations of Abram)

- How long has it been since the end of chapter 16?
- What has life been like during those 13 years?
- How long has it been since God first gave Abram the promise of a child? (*see 12:4*)
- Martin Luther once made the statement: “It’s God’s way to empty a man first before filling him with his blessing.” Explain how that statement is fitting here.
- As God here speaks to Abram, he reveals himself by the Hebrew name “El Shaddai” which is translated as “God Almighty.” Considering the context, how is that name comforting to Abram?

- After revealing himself as God Almighty, God reveals his expectations of Abram here with the command: “Live in My presence and be blameless.” Note the commentary below about how to understand that command.
 - “The translation ‘and be blameless’ is misleading (as is also the KJV ‘be perfect’). The word really means ‘be complete.’ What El Shaddai was asking of Abram was to live his whole life before God in the confidence that God’s unlimited power could compel even nature to do what is contrary to itself.”

(People’s Bible: Genesis, p.150)
 - Note: this same word had appeared previously in our discussion of Noah in Genesis 6:9.
- Note: The word “Covenant” appears 13 times in this chapter. The Covenant is an emphasis here. Yet, this is not the first time God talked about a covenant with Abram. When was the last time in Genesis that you heard about a covenant? What’s God’s point here?

Read Genesis 17:3-8 (God’s Commitment to Bless)

- Note Abram’s response to God: “Abram fell facedown.” Was this falling down before God in fear of the power of the Almighty God, or was this falling down in worship, thanks, gratitude and praise?
- So far in the book of Genesis we have used Abram’s given name which means “exalted father.” How was that name ironic?
- Why did God change Abram’s name? (*hint: Abraham means “father of many”*)
- From your knowledge of Bible history, how was promise found in the name Abraham fulfilled?
 - Galatians 3:29 – “*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.*”

- God not only promised that Abraham would be the father of many, but he also promised that Abraham would be the father of nations and kings. Name some kings who descended from Abraham.
- Why does God give Abraham a renewed promise about the land?
- Evaluate: “In view of the confusion in the religious world today about ownership of the Holy Land, perhaps it ought to be restated that God’s two promises, ‘I will give this land to your descendants’ and ‘I will be their God,’ are inseparably linked. If in subsequent years Abraham’s descendants rejected the second promise, they also forfeited the first. But as long as they remained faithful to their faithful God, they had assurance that the land of Canaan would be their home indefinitely.” *(People’s Bible: Genesis, p.152)*

Read Genesis 17:9-14 (God’s Expectations of Abram)

- Compare the beginning of verse 4 to verse 9. What do you notice?
- From this moment and for the rest of the Old Testament times, God commanded that all males among Abraham’s descendants (also including any males living with Abraham and his descendants) to be circumcised. Note the commentary below:
 - “The male organ was singled out since it’s the instrument of procreation by which sin is transmitted from father to child. Life needs to be purified at its very source.”
 - “Normally ancient covenants were inscribed on clay tablets; this covenant was in the flesh of a man’s body.”
- How serious was God’s requirement that Abraham’s children be circumcised? (verse 14)

- What do the following passages add to the discussion of circumcision?
 - Jeremiah 9:25-26 – ²⁵ “The days are coming”—the Lord’s declaration—“when I will punish all the circumcised yet uncircumcised: ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, and all the inhabitants of the desert who clip the hair on their temples. All these nations are uncircumcised, and the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”
 - Exodus 4:18-26 – ¹⁸ Then Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, “Please let me return to my relatives in Egypt and see if they are still living.” Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”
¹⁹ Now in Midian the Lord told Moses, “Return to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead.” ²⁰ So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took God’s staff in his hand.
²¹ The Lord instructed Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, make sure you do all the wonders before Pharaoh that I have put within your power. But I will harden his heart so that he won’t let the people go. ²² Then you will say to Pharaoh: This is what Yahweh says: Israel is My firstborn son. ²³ I told you: Let My son go so that he may worship Me, but you refused to let him go. Now I will kill your firstborn son!”
²⁴ On the trip, at an overnight campsite, it happened that the Lord confronted him and sought to put him to death. ²⁵ So Zipporah took a flint, cut off her son’s foreskin, and threw it at Moses’ feet. Then she said, “You are a bridegroom of blood to me!” ²⁶ So He let him alone. At that time she said, “You are a bridegroom of blood,” referring to the circumcision.

Read Genesis 17:15-16 (God’s Commitment to Bless)

- Sarai’s name is changed to Sarah (which means “princess”). How is this a fitting name for her?
- Unlike the name change of Abram to Abraham, we don’t know of a difference in meaning from Sarai to Sarah. Whether or not there was a different meaning between those two names, what was the purpose in the name change?
- How does verse 16 serve to highlight verse 1?

Read Genesis 17:17-18 (Abraham Speaks)

- Do you view Abraham's laughter in a positive or a negative light?
- What is Abraham saying in his request in verse 18: "If only Ishmael were acceptable to You"?

Read Genesis 17:19-21 (God's Commitment to Bless)

- What does the name Isaac mean?
- God makes clear that the promise (the Savior) will not come through Ishmael, but rather through Isaac. Yet, God does not forget about Ishmael. How do these words help us better understand Abraham's request in verse 18?
- Note: Even before Isaac is born, God is talking about Isaac's offspring.

Read Genesis 17:22-27 (Abraham Responds)

- What do you notice about the way Abraham responds?
- What questions are left unanswered?

"God has not called us to follow him blindfolded. Christian faith is not a leap in the dark. Like Abraham, we have God's word of promise. As we, like Abraham, follow God in trust and obedience, we can say this with the Apostle Paul: 'I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him' (2 Timothy 1:12)."

(People's Bible: Genesis, p. 156-157)