

BIBLE STORY: GOD’S COVENANT WITH ABRAM AND HIS NAME CHANGE

Genesis 15:1-6; 17:1-22

Central Thoughts

- Our salvation depends entirely upon God’s promise to us in Christ (the Gospel).
- The covenant that God made with Abraham is the Gospel of Jesus Christ because Jesus is the promised Seed of Abraham through whom the blessing of salvation would be given to all the families of the earth.
- Circumcision was given to Abraham to teach us that salvation depends entirely upon Christ and the promise of the Gospel and not upon our own efforts.
- Abram’s and Sarai’s names were changed to Abraham and Sarah as a sign of God’s faithfulness to His promise of salvation.

Discussion Questions

What did the LORD promise to be for Abram?

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and great reward.”

What does it mean whenever the LORD says, “Do not be afraid”?

It means that the LORD has forgiven our sins and we need not fear death and condemnation.

What does it mean that the LORD is our “shield” and “great reward”?

It means that He protects and shields us from all harm from sin, death, and Satan’s power; and it means that the LORD Himself is the gift or “great reward” of faith in His promises.

Why does Abram respond to the LORD by saying that he is childless and has no heir?

According to God’s promise in Genesis 12:1-3 when the LORD called Abram to faith, He promised Abram that He would make of Abram a great nation and bless him with a son born according to the promise and with many descendants.

Was it proper for Abram to ask for an heir?

Yes, because the LORD had made a promise to give Abram an heir.

What part of His promise does the LORD confirm to Abram?

That a son would be born from his own body and that his descendants would be like the stars of heaven in number.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, how did Abram respond to the Word of the LORD?

Abram believed in the LORD, and [the Lord] accounted this faith in the LORD to Abram for righteousness. In other words, through faith in the promise of a son, Abram was declared righteous by the LORD. He was justified by faith and not by works.

NOTE: Abram was 75 years old (Genesis 12:4) when he was first called to faith in the LORD by the promise God made to him. At the beginning of chapter 17, Abram is now 99 years old, and he and Sarai have not yet been given the son that God had promised.

How does the Lord continue to call to Abram to be His disciple and to live in the forgiveness of the Lord’s promise?

“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.” “Blameless” is a description of how we are declared or accounted “righteous” for Jesus’ sake. It describes our justification in Christ and the call to trust in Him.

What did the Lord confirm to the 99-year-old Abram?

That the Lord would indeed keep His covenant with Abram and multiply him exceedingly.

How did Abram respond to the Lord?

He fell on his face and worshipped the Lord.

What name change did the Lord give to Abram as a sign of God’s faithfulness to His covenant (promise)?

The Lord changed his name from “Abram” (exalted father) to “Abraham” (father of many nations).

What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

The Gospel is the “good news” of all that God in love has done for us in Christ to redeem us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. God declares us righteous through faith in Christ, just as Abraham was declared righteous through faith in His promise.

How is God’s covenant with Abraham the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament?

It is an everlasting promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation through the Seed of Abraham, which calls all sinners to faith in Christ and brings them into the family of Abraham (the family of faith in the promise of salvation in Christ).

What is circumcision?

Cutting off the foreskin of a male.

What does this physical act teach Abraham and every believer in Christ?

Abraham could not produce a son with Sarah by his own power, but rather the son of Abraham would be conceived and born by the strength of God’s promise alone. The gift of salvation in Christ rests entirely upon the strength and power of the Gospel that is received by faith alone.

What did Abraham learn over the 24 years since he first received the promise of a son?

He learned to trust in the Lord’s promise alone and not in his own strength.

What did the Lord confirm for Abraham and Sarai by changing Sarai’s name to Sarah?

That the Son of the Promise would be born from Sarah just as the Lord had promised.

What does the name Sarah mean?

Sarah means “princess”

Why did Abraham laugh at the idea that he and Sarah would yet have a son?

It was like a joke to Abraham that he would have a son at the age of 100, after having just been circumcised, and that Sarah would give birth at the age of 90.

How did Abraham express the notion that it was impossible for he and Sarah to have this child?

He proposed that Ishmael, the son born to him from Sarah’s servant Hagar, become the son of the promise.

Why was it impossible for Ishmael to be that son?

Ishmael was not born according to God’s promise but by Abraham’s works.

Despite their doubts, fears, and laughter at the Lord’s promise, what did the Lord do?

He confirmed His promise and kept His Word.

Meditation on the Bible Story

When a 99-year-old newly circumcised man and his 89-year-old wife are able to conceive and give birth to a son, it is a miracle of God’s grace and not by their own works. God made a promise to Abraham that in his Seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and He kept that promise despite their doubts or the frailty of old age. God’s promise of salvation in the call of the Gospel is the sole source of our salvation. The circumcision of Abraham and his and Sarah’s name change reinforce that salvation is entirely a gift of God’s grace in the promise of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Abraham and Sarah were called to faith in Christ by the promise made to Abraham, so are we called to faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit by the call of the Gospel. As the Lord in love changed their names as a sign that they belonged to Him through faith in His promise, so the Lord in love declares us to be His children and gives us His name in our Baptism. As the Lord was Abraham’s shield and great reward, the Lord is our shield and great reward. As Abraham was declared righteous through faith in God’s promise, so are we declared righteous through faith in the Gospel of Christ. As the Lord called Abraham to be His disciple and to walk before the Lord in His forgiveness, so the Lord calls us to be His disciples in our Baptism and declares us blameless.

Prayer on the Bible Story

O Lord, we give thanks to you for the call of the Gospel and our Baptism into Christ. As you declared Abraham righteous through faith in Your promise, so comfort and strengthen us by the promise of our Baptism that we are forgiven all our sins, are declared righteous, and have become Your dear children, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



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