

Genesis Chapter 17 Commentary

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

"the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3 And Abram fell on his face:" We notice that this is an "if" covenant. The Lord tells Abram; ***"walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee,"*** This is for Abraham to ratify his side of the covenant.

"walk before me, and be thou perfect." We have the same commandment in the New Testament: ***Mt 5:48 "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."*** Live the Christian life to the fullest extent; and you will receive spiritual blessings in abundance.

"4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee," God tells Abraham; I am going to do what I promised. My promise is not dependent upon your actions; it will come to pass. We, today, have the same assurance of our eternal salvation. God will fulfill his promise to us, if we are his chosen people. ***Heb 6:17-20; 17 "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: 18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: 19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; 20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec."***

Abram means; *high father* and Abraham means; *father of a multitude*. What significance has the change of name from Abram to Abraham? It signifies that God is causing a change to occur in Abram's life. Having previously been called of God, and well on the way of his pilgrim journey, Abram's name and life are changed.

We understand that Abram has not fully trusted God from his actions and disobedience. We shall see; Abraham will have a steadfast faith in God. How does that relate to us? When I first began my pilgrimage, at the age of 17, I didn't know hardly any scripture, or have knowledge of what it meant to be a Christian. God, at different times in my pilgrimage, has made drastic changes in my circumstances; and each time my faith and trust in God has been greatly multiplied. I think most people experience this in their Christian walk, because I have heard many confess this very thing happening in their lives.

"but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee." We remember in Genesis 12:2; God promised Abram to be the father of a nation, in singular form. Now we see the promise to Abraham to be the father of nations, in plural form. Notice; God states that this has already been purposed and speaks to Abraham as if it is done already. We know this had not come to fruition at this time, however, if God has purposed it to be, He can address it as if it has already happened.

Why? Scripture testifies of this in: ***Da 4:35 "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"*** Nothing can change God's divine will and purpose.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

"and kings shall come out of thee." God is always faithful to do what he says he will. We see the fulfillment acknowledged in New Testament scripture in: ***Mt 1:1-6; 1 "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. 2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; 3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; 4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; 5 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; 6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;"*** This was fulfilled many times in the generations that lead us to the birth of Christ. However, Jesus Christ is the ultimate promised seed and King.

In ***Mt 1:16 "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."*** We find that God delivered on his promise; and gives us the lineage to Jesus Christ.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

"for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Everlasting means; *to the vanishing point; which is indicative to the end of an age, or some set circumstance, it can also mean eternal in the proper context.* This covenant is eternal to God's people throughout all time and into eternity. There are several reasons for this being an eternal covenant; one of which is; the covenant promise was, ultimately, of the promised seed, Jesus Christ, who is eternal. AS the salvation wrought by Christ is eternal then this had to be an eternal covenant from Abraham until eternity. Another point is; man, in the mortal state, must die, but, the soul of man never dies; therefore we see the eternal consequence of God's promise to ***"thee, and they seed after thee."*** This covenant remains true today to God's people. It will remain true in eternity; where we shall see our King, Jesus Christ, on the throne of God; eternal, high, and lifted up.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

"the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession;" Everlasting means; *to the vanishing point; which is indicative to the end of an age, or some set circumstance, it can also mean eternal in the proper context.* It is understood that this is not an eternal covenant. Why? If it were eternal possession on earth; then there would never be the destruction of this earth, which we know will happen according to scripture, seen in:

- ***Mt 24:35 "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."***
- ***2Pe 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth***

also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

- Re 21:1 "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."

As we consider this "**everlasting possession**;" we understand that this is everlasting to the point that God's will and purpose are fulfilled. We understand; when Christ fulfilled the sacrificial law and founded the church of Salvation by Grace; this promise was fulfilled in the literal sense; and now only continues in the spiritual sense; as the "**everlasting possession**" being the church of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, which will be delivered into eternity when this natural earth and heaven are destroyed.

Canaan means; *to bend the knee; hence, to humiliate, vanquish:--bring down (low), into subjection, under, humble (self), subdue*. This is indicative of the future, how? Think about this. For God to give Canaan to Israel; the inhabitants thereof had to be subdued for them to have possession.

This is the Land of Promise to Israel; and is representative of the church of Christ on the earth today, which is a Land of Promise to us. For us to inhabit this land; our dead and alienated selves had to be driven out, and we had to be born again and subdued to the will of God. We had to be made willing to walk in the way he commands; just as Israel had to do in their day.

9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

"**Thou shalt keep my covenant**" We are reminded of the conditionality of this covenant. Remember, we pointed out earlier that the covenant that God was making with Abraham was a conditional covenant? Now you plainly see the reason it is conditional, it requires Abraham and his people to do something. We have further evidence that the "**everlasting possession**" was conditional; because Israel was removed from the land of promise several times for disobedience to God.

God also requires of you and me today to do something once we have been born again. What is required of us? To make our profession of faith, show we have been circumcised in the heart, be baptized following the example of Christ, and living the life of a Christian.

10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. 11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. 12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. 13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Token means; *a sign, as a flag, beacon, monument, evidence, mark*. Circumcising the foreskin can be thought of as signing a contract between you and God. By signing; you are declaring; you are going to do what God requires; in exchange for the blessing that he has promised to give.

We notice that God includes all people that dwell, make their home among the Israelites, with Israel. The practice of circumcision continued as a token until the time of Christ, and was fulfilled in him. We have this testimony in: ***Lu 2:21 "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb."*** When Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial law; this practice was changed from the circumcision of the flesh to the circumcision of the heart; seen in: ***Ro 2:29 "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."***

"and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant." Again, we see the phrase ***"everlasting covenant"*** and we know that this is not an eternal covenant or sign. How? As demonstrated above; this was only required, until God's purpose and will was accomplished in Christ; which ended the need for the fleshly sign and established the need for spiritual circumcision.

How does this apply to us today?

- ***Ro 2:29 "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*** "Not in the letter" means not literally in the flesh but Spiritually.
- ***Ro 6:17 "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."*** Obedience from the heart.
- ***2Co 3:3 "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."*** Spiritual circumcision.
- ***Heb 8:10 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:"*** Spiritual circumcision.

As we look at these references; we see that today it is the inward circumcision of the heart that is the necessary. This is manifested to ourselves, and others, by making public profession of our faith in Christ, joining the local church body, and being baptized. These actions acknowledge that we are born again children of God.

Circumcision of the heart is not only New Testament but Old Testament also:

- ***De 10:16 "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked."***
- ***De 30:6 "And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."*** This also demonstrates to us that God saved people in Old Testament times by Grace, just as He does today.

14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

We see here; the "*uncircumcised soul*" shall be cut off. This gives us a picture, of the text in **Ro 2:29** that to be a Child of God you must be born again, and that new birth is not accomplished by natural circumcision, but by the inward circumcision of the heart.

15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. 16 And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

Sarai means; *a head person (of any rank or class)*. Sarah means; *a mistress, female noble, lady, princess, queen*. Matthew Henry, in his commentary, points out that God did the same thing to both names; he added an "h" in both and removed the "i" in Sarai. The significance of this to me is; God had to change both Abram and Sarai, before he would give the promised seed. God had to remove the man's "i" from the picture, to demonstrate that it is all of God. This is reflective of the promised seed, which would be brought forth from their lineage; which is the royal seed. The chosen people and family of God, all saved by the grace of God; with no human working "i" in the picture.

17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

Have you ever laughed in your heart at what God says he will do? We often do, I'm afraid, by our actions. However, we see that God convinced Abraham that what he said was true by the future events in his life.

J. Vernon McGee points out, in his bible studies, that there is a prophetic picture in this scene. He states that it is a picture of the resurrection. How, you ask? What happened at the resurrection of Jesus Christ? The dead body was made alive. What happened for the birth of Isaac to take place? Abraham and Sarah both were past the age of bearing children. Their child bearing bodies were dead. God restored (resurrected) reproductive life to their bodies, and brought forth a man child.

18 And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!

Abraham, in his unbelief, asked that God make Ishmael his promised seed, doubting that God was able to bring about the birth of a son to him and Sarah. Abraham didn't understand that Ishmael was not "*the promised seed*."

19 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

We notice; God ignores Abraham's plea for Ishmael; by rebuking Abraham and Sarah for their unbelief. God explains in no uncertain language; Isaac is the promised seed and I will establish my covenant with him, not Ishmael.

Isaac means: *laughter, to laugh outright*. We can look at this definition in several ways;

- Isaac was so named, because Abraham and Sarah laughed at the idea of having a child in their old age.

- After Isaac was born, Abraham and Sarah laughed, rejoiced greatly, in the gift of a son in their old age, and the fulfillment of the promise of God.
- God laughed at Abraham and Sarah; knowing what He would do and how he would bring salvation to earth through the promised seed, which was prophetic of the coming Messiah.

20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.

God did what he promised Abraham (and Hagar) and blessed Ishmael to become a great nation, after having many children. However, Ishmael was not the one to receive the covenant promise of God, which ultimately leads to the way of salvation.

21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

This covenant of God is made with the promised heir from the true marriage as designed by God. This lineage will lead us to Christ and the way of salvation. This should be our desire today, to have the covenant promise of God, Salvation by Grace. Without the covenant of God's promised salvation; we have no hope, or even a prospect, of reaching heaven and immortal glory.

Ga 4:21-31; 21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? 22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. 24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. 25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. 26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. 28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. 29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

When we consider the previous verses, and the reference verses; we see a picture of God working out the plan of salvation and fulfilling what He had promised and had prophesied.

22 And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. 23 And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him. 24 And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. 27 And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.

We see now; Abraham beginning to exercise true faith in God. God made a promise to Abraham and God kept his promise. How do we know that Abraham will exercise true faith? In the NT in Romans chapter 4 we have the record of the faith of Abraham, not Abram. Abraham begins his exercise of faith, after his name is changed, by carrying out the exercise of circumcision. This is demonstrated in the New Testament in: **Ro 4:16-25; 16 "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, 17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. 18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. 19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: 20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."**

Thus we see; God had a plan and purpose for salvation by grace; even when the sacrificial/ceremonial law was in effect. Do you understand that God has always saved people by his grace? What do you mean? How were people saved before Christ came? God chose them and saved them by grace. He chose whom he would and saved them by his own means. God demonstrated his choice of who he would save in many ways; here are a couple of examples which make the point:

- **Ge 6:8 "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."** Noah and his family were saved by God's choice.
- The nation Israel was saved by God's choice.

We thank God for:

- His **"eternal covenant"**
- His **"everlasting covenant"**
- Salvation by grace! In spite of ourselves and our unbelief.
- Remission of sins through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ!

May we be found faithful, in our service to God, through the power of the Holy Spirit! Lord! Help mine unbelief, we pray in the name of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, Amen.