

Sent: Wednesday, December 12, 2018 3:42 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Genesis 17:1-18:15

Our last lesson (on Genesis 16) ended on a somber note! Abram and Sarai had taken matters into their own hands to have a son (through Sarai's maid, Hagar), the son whom they now assumed would be "heir" to all the divine promises! But it wasn't in accordance with God's plan! Abram, the "man of faith," failed to exercise faith! He now had a son, Ishmael, whom he loved! And yet no "land"! And God must have seemed so far away--and the future so uncertain! Has God forgotten him? It's been 13 years since God last appeared to him! He was 99 years old! Time seemed to be running out! It was now in his hand--or so he must have thought!

But then, in Genesis 17 (the first part of our text for last nite's study), God appears to his aging servant for the fifth time, to affirm His promise of both land and descendants! Each time God has appeared to him it's been with more challenges and surprises!

"I am God Almighty; walk before Me; and be blameless! I will establish My covenant, between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly!" (Genesis 17:1-2) For the first time, God identifies Himself as "El Shaddai"--the Almighty God who could do anything! Arnold notes the name as one that emphasized God's invincible power and faithfulness to fulfill His promises! And Constable writes that this was certainly timely and appropriate in view of the things God proceeded to reveal to Abram that He would do! It would require supernatural power!

Abram's immediate reaction was to "fall on his face" before Him!

Then God responds by bringing into sharper focus, and reaffirming, the covenant promises He had ratified in Genesis 15: "As for Me, My covenant is with you! And you will be the father of a multitude of nations!" (Gen. 17:4)

Then the name change! (Names are obviously important to God and always carry special meaning and implication!) "No longer will your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham! For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations!" But He goes on: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you!" (Wow! Is Abram, now "Abraham," able to pick himself up from the ground?)

But God is not done! "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you! I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God!" (vv. 7-8)

But there was something God required of Abraham! Abraham and "every male among you shall be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin...as a sign of the covenant...But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people!" (Circumcision was to become forever associated with God's eternal covenant with Israel but would also take on the idea of "circumcision of the heart," as Moses instructed, in Deuteronomy 10:6 and elsewhere, and later as the Apostle Paul would teach in Romans 2:28-29)

"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter"!)

Then God reveals something even more amazing (in vv. 15-22)--obviously catching the new Abraham again off-guard! "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but 'Sarah' shall be her name! I will bless, and indeed! I will give you a son by her! Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her!" Guess what Abraham's reaction is! He again "fell on his face and (this time) laughed..." and questioned God: "Will Sarah, who is ninety years old by the way, bear a child? ...Oh that Ishmael might live before you?" (Who among us as men would not have responded in a similar way?)

God's response was emphatic and clear! "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac (meaning "laughter" and here, as Dave Brien said, we see "laughter brought to reality!"); and I will establish My covenant with him..."!

"As for Ishmael, I have heard you (Abraham); behold I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly! He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation (and we've seen this through the Arab world)! But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you!" (And this promise is sometimes referred to as the real "watershed issue" of this story!)

Well, we see Abraham somehow gathering himself and obeying God to the letter! He and Ishmael, and all the men of Abraham's household are circumcised "in the very same day as God had said to him!" (Here we see again how Abraham's growing faith leads to obedience to God's word! A lesson for us!)

And so we made it through Genesis 17, but Genesis 18:1-15 follows!

Chapter 17 must have ended on a real "sore note," humanly speaking! But then (and we don't really know how soon later), God appears again to Abraham--for the sixth time--although he may not have immediately recognized it! This time apparently through a "theophany" and two angels! Who "just happened" to be passing by? The angels were on their way to another place, as we'll learn in our next lesson, but God clearly appeared to follow up on His promise of a "son" by Sarah!

"Where is Sarah your wife?" God asks! (Doesn't that remind you of the same "omniscient" and confronting God who called for Adam, in Genesis 3:9, or to Cain, in Genesis 4:9--and calls us "to the fore"?)

Then we see the "immaculate" announcement! "I will surely return to you at this same time next year; and behold! Sarah your wife will have a son..." who He had already named "Isaac"! (Does this remind you in any way of Gabriel's appearance and announcement to the Virgin Mary, Luke 1 about how she would conceive in her womb and bear a son...and call His name Jesus...who would reign over the house of Jacob forever"?)

Sarah just happened to be listening and responded by "laughing," the Bible says, "to herself"-- and questioning how in the world she could ever bear a son! But God, being God, heard and knew her very thoughts, and gave a remarkable response, which should forever be the motto for our lives: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14)

And so we end our study of the great book of Genesis on a beautiful Christmas note! Not only did God promise that a "son" would be born to Abraham and Sarah, but the same God promised, through the prophet Isaiah (in Isaiah 7:14): "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (meaning "God with us")!

One of the lessons we can take from our study of Genesis is that we can trust God fully to fulfill His promises! And that with God, nothing is impossible!

Merry Christmas everybody! See you in the New Year as we take on more of Genesis and, among other things, see more of Jesus Christ, and God's plan for the ages, in this great Old Testament book of the Bible!

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