

Faithful Living in a Fallen World: A Study in the Life of Abraham

Lesson #8: *Genesis 17*

The God Who Has No “Commitment Issues”



[MM & “commitment issues . . .] There’s a lot of differences between the God of the Bible and any other “god,” in Biblical times and most any other time. **Verse 2** highlights a major difference between Yahweh and other deities. What is it?

**** In the ancient world, there were no COVENANTS between a deity and humans, EXCEPT in Israel. [Covenant = a binding agreement where both sides are committed, like signing a house or car note or better yet, getting married.] Only Yahweh relates to people by**

COVENANT, because only Yahweh is willing to COMMIT Himself. ** [Other gods simply demanded worship & if they really did anything for you at all, it was by the hardest “O Baal, hear us!” (1 Kings 18:26).]

Covenant [a bond of commitment] is, in fact, *dominates* the chapter with the word “covenant” itself appearing no less than 13 times!

Which brings us the practical question: **What does it mean for us (Galatians 3:29) to have a Covenant God? 3 IMPLICATIONS of having THIS kind of God.**

1. To have a Covenant God means we have a God who tends to MYSTIFY us.

- Notice the time lapsing between **Chapter 16** and **17**. In Verses **5, 8, 16-17**, it’s as if Yahweh is saying, “That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.” What is it about God that seems strange and sometimes unwelcome to us?

[We’re not too happy about it sometimes, but God NEVER seems to be in a hurry! And, B/C the passage of time between the PROMISES of God and the FULFILMENT of those promises seems to be a problem for us! Call it “culture rubbing off on us” or something, BUT . . . Truth be known, WE prefer a deity w/high blood pressure Who is

on the move; a deity whose promises are delivered with microwavable instructions, and not a deity who is a slow cooker w/His savory promises.]

- There's another Truth that sneaks out at us in the years between **16:16** and **17:1**. What is it? [In the life of a believer, time pretty much just marches on (we want ACTION!) and very large swatches of our time is filled with the ordinary business of the daily "grind" of being a Christian whatever . . . grocery stores, oil changes, standing @ copy machines, carpooling, allergy shots, music lessons, and buying a delicious casserole @ Sugar Magnolia and pulling it out of the oven. That's life. Life is so . . . daily – even for CHRISTIANS!] How do people "cope" with this challenge? [Some people "cope" w/a constant search for "religion on steroids" full of estatic spiritual "highs" w/a the bells & whistles, smells and bells that move them emotionally! (Some people who have left the church to go to a more "exciting" church!) And how should we deal with this challenge? [We must ask ourselves the question, "Can I stand the ordinariness of the Christian life and just put 1 foot in front of another?"]

2. To have a Covenant God means we have a God who BLESSES us with PREMIER and PRECIOUS promises.

- All of **Vv 3-8 & 15-32** rehearse God's special promises. We will focus on the major promises at the heart of the Covenant mentioned in **Verses 7-8**.
 - There's the promise of an UNFADING INHERITANCE, **Vs 8**. How will Abraham and his descendants (us) inherit the land? [It is a **FUTURE inheritance, in the case of Abraham & his descendents, an inheritance received AFTER death (in our life, someone ELSE dies, and we receive his/her inheritance. For Christians, WE are the ones who receive our inheritance after death).**] What is being affirmed here (*cf Hebrews 11:16; 1 Peter 1:3-4*). [2 things. There IS life after death, b/c if Abramam is to receive the "land", it must be after he dies, b/c he did NOT receive it during his lifetime on this earth as we know it. Also, we affirm, from Scripture, that Heaven is not ethereal, not immaterial, not vapor or "Cool Whip". Heaven is material, it is the life after life after death, in a restored and steroided New Heavens & New Earth (Revelation 21-22).] **What does this testimony to Abraham mean to us? **

**** DEATH cannot RUIN your inheritance. **** [We die HOPING our inheritance will be handled correctly, but you know there's a lot that can happen between the writing of a will & execution of a will] [story: Even amongst all the chaos & destruction before the fall of Berlin, GR in 1945, 2 operations went on w/o a break: The keeping of weather records, & the operation of 11 German breweries (kata the government,

involved in “essential” production). **LESSON: Even in a fallen world, there are some things even war & destruction cannot stop. AND DEATH CANNOT CANCEL OUT THE EVERLASTING INHERITANCE THE SEED OF ABRAHAM (THAT’S US!) WILL RECEIVE!]**

- There’s the promise of an **INDESCRIBABLE GIFT**, esp **Vs 7b**. ****What is the Gift? What are the implications of this gift? [The GIFT of the Covenant is GOD HIMSELF! What gift could be BETTER??]**

**** God is saying, “I will **BE** for you. I will **EXIST** for you. I will exercise my **GOD-NESS** for you. I will be **COMMITTED** to you. **** [Let me offer a pale, pasty analogy... Ladies, when a man promises to be “your loving and faithful husband,” he finishes by saying “. . . in plenty and in want, in joy & in sorrow, in sickness & in health . . . as long as we both shall live.” IOW, “Darling, honey, sweetie pie, I will be **WITH YOU & FOR YOU**, in **EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE** of life I will be **ALL THAT I NEED TO BE** for you in **EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE** of life.” I know, we **HUSBANDS** should be swallowing really hard right now! But it’s **THIS KIND** of relationship no time can exhaust, no circumstances can change (“I’ve moved on . . .”), no disaster can destroy, no catastrophe can crush, no **HUMAN** abandonment can alter.]

3. To have a Covenant God means we have a God Who expects us to enthusiastically **EMBRACE His Covenant.**

Verse 9 indicates that God expects a response from us (cf **Vs 1, 11**, and then **23-27**). [This is **NOT** a “no obligation gift card to Bed, Bath, & Beyond that requires nothing of us – except just enjoy shopping! **WE** have **DUTIES**, it’s **RELATIONAL**, you remember!]

- What is circumcision, basically? [In the OT, it’s **COVENANT BRANDING** (painful branding). It marks a man out as **BELONGING** to God and **PLEGDED** to his Covenant God. A man would look upon that sign on his body and think, “I belong to Yahweh; & Yahweh has made promises to me”.] How is circumcision in Israel different from circumcision among other peoples of the Near East? [In every other Near Eastern country, circumcision was a puberty or pre-marriage rite of passage (makes you wonder if a male would look forward w/must gusto to their teenage years / marriage!). **ONLY IN ISRAEL** was circumcision performed on the **8th** day after birth.] What is the significance of circumcision? What does it signify? (cf **4-8, 15-21**) [It signifies, formally, that you have been **COMMITTED** to the Lord, and **YOU** are identified as belonging to the **LORD**.] What would be a helpful analogy to help us understand the significance of circumcision? [**Believe it or not, a WEDDING BAND! On the one hand, a man could look @ his wedding band and say, “When she put this band on my finger, my wife made promises to me.” And the man could say, “This ring means I belong to my bride; I am IDENTIFIED w/HER. & I got a RING on it to PROVE this promise and identity!”]**

- How does the rite carry over to our lives today? [In the practice of BAPTISM – in this church, we don't REQUIRE that you baptize your children or even believe your children should be baptized, but you need to understand WHY we think it's BIBLICAL to baptize your children...]. Note: Eight days after birth was the norm for circumcision. Why is that important? [Abraham didn't DISPUTE this, "Lord, are you SURE about this? Don't you think he ought to WAIT until he is old enough to UNDERSTAND what is happening? I mean, he's just gonna CRY and all that, but he won't have a clue what's going on! I mean, he should be allowed to choose for himself, shouldn't he?"] Answer is NO. In circumcision as in baptism, it's the PARENT'S responsibility to make sure their child is marked out from the beginning as belonging to the Lord.
- **** The Covenant SIGN has changed [to baptism, AND is expanded to include females as well as males], but not the Covenant PATTERN. Therefore, CHILDREN of covenant believers are to receive the SIGN of the Covenant, which is BAPTISM (Colossians 2:8-15). **** [The SIGN means the child is being consecrated to the Lord, "First, he/she's YOUR child, Lord, NOT ours; & our HOPE for his/her future is that his/her heart will be CLEANSED by the Holy Spirit, even as water washes us clean."]
- A practical question, and answer . . . (cf Vs 14) HOW does this effect how we raise our children? [The baptism becomes a help for in-house evangelism. Celebrate their baptism! Talk to them about what the water represents and what their baptism tells them about WHO they are and WHAT their greatest need is? You may want a copy of the parents vows to show your child, or even be brave enough to ask, "So how are we doing?"] Your child STILL has a CHOICE about their baptism, but it's NOT a choice of "WILL I . . . "? It's a choice of "Will I REJECT my baptism & be cut off from the Covenant?" For parents, we may have to @ some point in time say to your child, "Your Mom & Dad put that sign of baptism on you to mark you off as belonging to God; but you CAN still say you want no part of this Covenant; you can cut YOURSELF off from the Covenant; you can reject your Covenant Lord – & face the consequences." Hard words, but there may come a time . . .]
- The *Matthew 28:19 / Genesis 17* connection . . . [Whether prospective (looking back at your adult baptism) or retrospective (looking back at your infant baptism), baptism should be a WELCOME sign, b/c either way, Baptism MARKS you & CLAIMS you for Christ. " . . . into the name of is a banking or accounting term that points to a TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP. Either way, here's the message of your baptism:]

**** I am not my OWN. I belong to ANOTHER. And I REJOICE in it! ****

What could be more delightful than that?!?