

Genesis 17:1–8

An Almighty Covenant to Sanctify

Wednesday, November 13, 2024 • Read Genesis 17:1-8

Questions from the Scripture text: How old was Abram in v1? How much time has passed since ch16? Who appears to Abram? What does He call Himself? What does He command Abram to do? What will YHWH make between Himself and Abram (v2)? What will He do? How does Abram respond in v3? How does God respond to that? What does God proceed to say about Himself in v4? What outcome will this have for Abram? What else is God changing for Abram in v5? What are some of the details in v6 about what God will do for Abram? With whom is this covenant established (v7)? How is this covenant relationship described? What else does God give them in this covenant (v8)?

What do believers who have been stumbling along in their own strength need? Genesis 17:1–8 looks forward to the hearing of God's Word, publicly read, in the holy assembly on the coming Lord's Day. In these eight verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **believers need to be turned away from themselves to the Lord Who covenants them to Himself—and Himself to them.**

It has now been another 14 years that the Lord has not spoken to Abram—14 years of Abram living with the consequences of his sin. Yahweh shows up and announces, "I am God Almighty!"

Abram has every reason to expect to be destroyed, but instead this announcement of God's power is the prelude to sustaining him. Not "be banished from before Me and suffer" but "walk before Me and be blameless."

What follows is statement after statement of God's commitment of Himself to Abram—and God also committing Abram to Himself.

This mutual commitment is called a "covenant," and establishes that wonderful relationship: He will be "God to you and your descendants after you."

This is so powerful that it even changes Abram's identity—changes his name: Abraham.

And the Holy Spirit comes to us in the New Testament and tells us that when we trust in Christ as Abraham did, then we too are objects of this almighty power, objects of this unswerving commitment, this identity-changing relationship with the Lord.

What do believers who have been stumbling along in their own strength need? This is the question we see presented in Abram, who has been dealing with the consequences of the Hagar choice for thirteen years, as this passage opens.

Such believers need the power of God Almighty at work in them. We might think that "I am God Almighty" is the prelude to destroying a sinner, since that is what Abram is. But it is instead the prelude to sustaining a saint, since that is also what Abram is: "I am God Almighty, [so] walk before Me and be blameless!"

Such believers need the presence of God Almighty pressed into them. The knowledge that we are before His face is a help against all fear of men, and even against service of self.

Such believers need the purity of God's standard applied to them. Be blameless. Not the run-of-the-mill blamelessness in the eyes of men, either. Blameless in the eyes of God! Only one who has been shown God's grace in Christ can have this as a standard, because only Christ's sacrifice and righteousness can be the sure fulfillment of such a standard on our behalf, and only Christ's life in us can be a sure hope that we will one day be conformed to such a standard.

Such believers need the promise of God Almighty covenanted to them. We who are so deserving of wrath need God's glorious swearing of Himself to us as an encouragement to our faith (cf. Heb 6:13-20). It was not for His sake that God entered into such a commitment, but for ours.

Such believers need the propriety (ownership) of God pronounced upon them. One way that God reaffirms that He has special ownership of Abram is by changing his name. "You are Mine, so you will be called what I call you." And so He calls us saint, brother, believer, sons of God, etc. in the Scripture.

Such believers need the prosperity (fruitfulness) of God's commitment held out unto them. What sad consequences we endure daily from our fall in Adam. But God's salvation in Christ is even more effective. v6, 8 present the opposite of Abraham's current experience. And as God tells us throughout Scripture of the effects of His gospel, we expect this opposite-fruit to continue.

Such believers need the persistence of God's covenant affirmed to them. Persistence across generations: just as the fall comes upon our children simply because they are ours, all of these covenant benefits are held out to them by God, also because they are ours. And persistence across time. This is still the same covenant that we are in when we believe in Jesus. It is an everlasting covenant that belongs to all who have the same faith in Christ as Abraham (cf. Rom 4:11-18, Gal 3:7, 29).

What are some things God has committed Himself to do by His power for you? What are some things that He has brought you into a commitment to do toward Him?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for covenanting us to Yourself and Yourself to us. Forgive us for trying to walk, or to be blameless, through our own strength. Be God to us, and to our children, forever; we ask through Christ, AMEN!

Suggested Songs: ARP87 "The Lord's Foundation" or TPH461 "Blessed Are the Sons of God"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Genesis 17 verses 1-8. These are God's words. When Abram was 99 years old Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him. I am almighty. God. Walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my Covenant between me and you and will multiply you exceedingly. Then Abram fell on his face and God talked with them.

Saying, as, for me, behold my Covenant is with you And you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram. But your name shall be Abraham. For, I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful. And I will make nations of you.

And Kings shall come from you. And I will establish my Covenant between me and you. And your descendants after you in their Generations, for an everlasting Covenant, to be God to you. And your descendants after you. Also, I give to you and your descendants after you've the land in which you were a stranger, all the land of Canaan.

As an everlasting possession. And I will be their God. And then the sense this reading of God's inspired And an errand toward. First one Begins by giving us Abram's age at the time, he's 99. The reason is the previous verse had given us Abram's age at that time. He was 86 And so there's 13 years of Silence between those two verses.

Remember Genesis wasn't originally given to us in chapters the chapters Are historically. Much later. And development. So, there's 13 years of Silence. Between. Chapter 16 verse 16 and chapter 17 verse 1 between two consecutive verses And that that silence as they say speaks volumes, In chapter 16. Abram and Sarai.

Lost patience, waiting for the Fulfillment of God's promise. And, They tried the method for producing the Covenant seed of giving sarai's, maid servant Hagar to Abram as a wife or as a concubine To Bear a child in sarai's place. And Ishmael, as we know, Was. From another scripture, a wild donkey of a man.

He was not the sort of child that they had hoped for. And so, in these 13 years of Silence during which we don't have any record, Of Gods appearing to Abram. And, 13 years in which Abram would have been living with the consequences of. trying to do things his own way sinning against God.

And, Tasting, the bitter fruit. Of having done. So. After that 13 years of Silence, Yahweh appears to Abram. And he says, I am God Almighty. Now, if you had been living with the consequences of your sin and you're following for 13 years and God it appeared to you and said I am God Almighty.

You would. not Unwise, or it would not be irrational for you to think. Well, that's it. The time is up. here now comes the almighty. God, whose Justice. I have offended. Whose Holiness, I have desecrated the relationship with With whom, I have. broken. And he is going to destroy me.

But God presents his Almighty power. Not as that, which is going to destroy. Abram as the sinner. But which is going to sustain Abram in being a saint. I am God Almighty. Walk before me. And to be blameless. This is wonderful. It's like when Luther Discovers that. When Romans 1 says that in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed.

That's not Devastating to men, although the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, but in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. Not in destroying men who are sinners. Supplying them with the righteousness that they don't have in themselves because they are sinners.

And just as in the gospel, the righteousness of God, which would have been within his rights to destroy us instead is given to us and becomes our own in. Jesus Christ obtained only by that Faith, which unites us to Christ. So also here as God appears the power of God, the almightiness of God which could well have been expected to destroy Abraham Abram.

Instead is that by which Abram will be enabled to walk before God. And be blameless. And so God goes on to say what he's going to do. In this Almighty power, he is going to cut a covenant. Between. Abram and himself were making to establish make the stand. A covenant between himself and Abram.

So he is going to bind himself to Abram, he is going to be Abram's own Covenant God, And he is going to bind Abram to himself. He is going to take Abram as his own Covenant. Subject, Covenant person. And so he says, I will make a covenant between me and you.

And we'll multiply you. Exceedingly. Abram falls on his face and worship. God continues to speak. It says, of course, a reminder to us as there are so many such reminders in scripture. That one of the primary ways that we worship God is by listening to his word, By receiving his word, as the word of God.

By submitting ourselves. Having our thoughts. Informed and shaped having our affections shaped and stirred. having our Wills stirred and commanded. By the words of God by God himself. And so, here Abram is worshiping by hearing. And God. tells him how This Covenant is going to give him.

Gives him even a change of identity now Abram's already converted. At this point, you remember back in chapter 15 and verse 6. He had believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And Romans and Galatians both make this point that he doesn't receive the sign of circumcision.

As something that converts him. He receives it as many years after his conversion as something. That affirms and helps him in his walk with God as a Believer. Now, Ishmael and Isaac obviously received the sign before their conversions. But the sign is also for them. Not only something that testifies to them.

Of the promise of God in Salvation, the promise of justification, by Grace alone, through faith alone, the promise of sanctification that comes yes, by our efforts by our actions. But, not powered by our effort or our action. But powered by God and his Almighty power and his grace, that said the sign testifies, To.

Both the one who is converted first and then receives the sign and the one who receives the sign first and then is converted. But here. even though he was converted, there is a change. There is a new phase in Abram's. Identity on the earth, Abramment, exalted, father.

but now, as belongs to God's covenant with him, In establishing a covenant, people in him, and from him. And with him. So that anyone who belongs to Abram will have to have the Covenant signed? Well, any male who belongs to Abram? We'll have to have the Covenant sign.

Abrams identity as a member of. And, in this case the founding member Of. God's people, God's gathered people on the earth. Gives him a change in his identity. he goes from being called exalted, father to being called father of a multitude. He goes from a name that has to do with.

his character and as produced by the grace of God in him and his status as a righteous, man and a prophet, and a Godly Man. To a name that identifies his relationship to the Covenant people. Father of a multitude. And so, we must remember that our baptisms are identifying marks upon us.

Not only, as those who have been set apart. To God but specifically as those who have been gathered into God's Church on the earth. That church member. Is a big part of our identity. Now, we don't all get our names changed to brother of a multitude or sister of a multitude.

It would be a very confusing if There were only really two names in the church. it would make addressing letters and such very difficult. But it is a big part of each of our identities. He says I will make you exceedingly. Fruitful. I will make nations of you.

I will let Kings shall come. From you. I will establish my Covenant. Between me and you and descendants after you in their Generations for an everlasting Covenant. And so, there are There are these. Covenantal considerations that come out of this new relationship. Between God and Abram and his descendants.

There are these visible Church considerations If we can use that language a little bit anachronistically, but back to this new development and the Gathering of people of God on Earth And as part of, This Covenant, everyone who is in it, everyone who belongs to the visible church is called to the same Faith.

To believe God about his promises and be counted righteousness through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To trust in God's Almighty power. As that which enables us to not just walk blamelessly, but to walk blamelessly in relationship with God. Walk before me and be blameless. He said in verse 17 verse 1 of chapter 17.

And so here he says, To be God to you and your descendants after you. Not just that he would be God to the And therefore that we are members of a church. That belongs to God, but that we would be brought to active living. And that we would walk by that Faith.

walking before him And being blameless. And so, there is There are two different things going on here and they're going to be Important. We get to Verse 18. And Abram says to God, oh, that Ishmael might live before you. He's asking that his son. he is about to circumcise and is going to be You know, it already is a member of the people of God on Earth.

He's already a member of the household of Abram and Abraham now and he's going to be marked as a member of the household of Abraham, but Abraham is going to be asking God as all Covenant parents should Ishmael would receive the inward part. Of that Covenant that he would not just be a member of the visible church but that he would be brought to justifying faith that he would be brought to sanctifying dependence upon the almighty God to walk before him to live before him.

And be blameless. And so, For each of us here, we've all received the Covenant sign. This side, of course, of The resurrection, the Covenant sign is not just for Males, it's also for females. So we've all been baptized and that tells us that a big part of our identity is church member In an in an age.

Well, I guess it's not just this age. It belongs to sinfulness and weakness of men throughout the ages. But this is an age in which There are many who do not value their Church membership enough. Or very much. And this passage comes and tells us no a big part of your identity.

If you're a member of the church ought to be, Being a member of the church. And so that's one way that this applies to us. But another way that it applies to us is reminding us. That. That which we See, displayed and experience some measure of in our membership, in the visible Church, testifies, to us of something that we need to be to have vitally true about us in our hearts, in our actual personal individual relationship with the Lord, by his grace through faith, that we would be those who Believe.

God about Christ and believe into the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore are counted, righteous are Justified and also that we would be those Who do our walking in this world? Not just as part of God's gathered people. But before the face of God, And who do so Independence upon the grace of God that we would walk before him.

And be blameless. Don't just be a member of the visible. Be called. By your visible church membership. To be a member of the invisible. To have the inward Eternal reality. Of the grace of God. In Jesus Christ. So this passage does both of those things. Reminds us church. That church membership is a big part of our identity and calls us to have.

Not just that visible Church membership, but invisible church membership. As well. Let's pray. Our gracious God in our heavenly Father, we thank you for this portion of your word. We thank you for the Wisdom in which you are apparently silent with Abram for this 13 years. We thank you for the grace, with which you broke that silence and the things that you spoke to him when you did.

So, And we pray that you would make us to know your wisdom and your patience and your grace. with us and your power to help us. To walk before you and to be blameless. Grant that there would be, none of us. who had only that outward church membership in the visible church but that each one of us would be as Abram would later.

Pray for his son Ishmael. That we would live before you forever. In Christ by faith. Which we ask in his name. Amen.