

Genesis 16-22—The Gospel According to Abraham

- **Unbelief Continues to Characterize Abram and Sarai (16)**
 - 16:2—And Sarai said to Abram, “behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.”
 - Abram and Sarai continue to disbelieve God and attempt to take control of making things happen—giving Hagar to Abram.
 - This characterizes us too though doesn't it? When God's will seems too unreasonable or his timing seems too slow, we constantly gravitate toward self-sufficiency and assuming control.
 - **Laughter is a theme of the section—17:17; 18:12,13,15; 19:12; 21:6, 9**
 - As all the grandeur of this promise land on Abraham, he simply cannot contain a response of overwhelmed laughter as he wonders how it is even possible.
 - Is God really thinking that a surgery on his genitals is going to solve what appears to be an insurmountable barrier?
 - The joke is on Abraham—God commands him to name his firstborn Isaac (“laughter”)
- **God's Covenant is Transformational (17:1-8)**
 - 17:4-7—Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.
 - At the most improbable time, transformation enters this picture
 - Abraham's name changes—the context changes as God reaffirms his promise of seed
 - The age, infertility and unbelief of Abram and Sarai reminds us of the darkness, void and chaos that preceded the creation in Genesis 1.
 - **Abram and Sarai's old, decrepit bodies and their lacking faith represents that. Yet, again, out of that darkness and chaos God is bringing about LIFE!**
- **Circumcision is the Sign of the Covenant (17:9-14)**
 - Signs point to greater realities—just as the bow was the sign of the covenant with Noah communicating God's promise to never destroy the earth by fire, circumcision (a knife cutting away flesh) is a sign pointing to **God's promise to bring life and lineage out of sterility and death.**
 - It is not a mistake that this sign, which so intricately deals with seed and lineage, is directly connected to the sexual reproduction organ that makes that happen!
 - This is a built in means to force the people of God to regularly lean in and believe God's promises!
 - **Circumcision also points forward to the New Covenant in Jesus**
 - **Deut 30:6—the Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and all your soul, and live...**
- **A New Humanity as the Aim of the Covenant (17:4-16)**
 - Abram-Abraham—“my father is exalted” to “father of multitudes”
 - Sarai-Sarah—she becomes “princess”—she is not only the mother of multitudes but the mother of a royal dynasty.
 - **Royalty has both an immediate implication—there will actually be a royal dynasty—and a spiritual implication—Abraham and Sarah are replacing Adam and Eve as vice-regents, bringing God's Kingdom and Plan to bear on the world.**
 - Galatians 3-4—talking about who are actually the sons of Abraham—all those joined to Christ, the One Seed to whom the promises point.
- **2 Implications from the Lot Narrative (18:22-19:38)**
 - **God's Covenant Promises penetrate and persevere through chaos and sin (19-20)**

- This narrative can seem weird and out of place in the flow of the narrative toward Isaac. What is it doing there? Why is it in this particular spot?
- This narrative is a reminder that this process of bringing about the promised seed, this journey is not happening easily and in a vacuum. It is happening in spite of and in the face of real sin and darkness.
- Lot's narrative looks a lot like Noah's—the two stories of divine judgment on sin look similar
 - Those who were saved from the judgment of God's wrath fall into a form of sin reminiscent of those who died in the judgment.
- **Abraham (and his seed) are put forward as the means through which God will work to save the nations.**
 - Abraham dares to argue with God regarding his plans to destroy Sodom. Ends up convincing God not to destroy the city if there are 10 righteous. He doesn't succeed in saving the city but merely one man and his 2 daughters—Lot.
 - The larger perspective of this story grants enlightening realities:
 - Abraham stands as an intercessor for the nations and the mouthpiece on their behalf whereby which they are given the possibility of salvation.
 - Points to the reality that Abraham and his seed will have consequences for the salvation of the nations.
- **The story of Isaac is a foreshadowing of the story of Christ (21)**
 - **21:1—God visits Sarah to tell her she will have a son just as he would likewise visit Mary.**
 - 4-fold Introduction of Isaac (21:3)—Abraham called on the name of his son, who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.
 - 4-fold description of Isaac at the command to sacrifice him (22:2)—take your son, your only son, the one whom you love, Isaac.
 - **This structure provides the OBVIOUS juxtaposition of blessing and curse.**
 - **The blessing of the birth of the seed and the depth of the curse of the attack on the seed.**
 - God, the promiser of life and author of blessing appears, ironically, to be the perpetrator of curse.
 - This mountain, the location of Abraham's original blessing, now appears to be the environment of his ultimate doom and curse and death.
 - Jerusalem—the location of this sacrifice is NOT COINCIDENTAL!
 - **The Sacrifice of the Ram is a SUBSTITUTE for Isaac—only mentioned as substitute**
 - **Leviticus 8-9—substitutionary sacrifice at the first sacrifice in the tabernacle**
 - **Leviticus 16—a substitutionary sacrifice on the annual Day of Atonement.**
 - The Day of Atonement is the, ultimately, the national institution of the private ceremony enjoyed by Abraham and Isaac. It is the reminder that Israel had been SPARED THE KNIFE OF SACRIFICE!
- **The goal of the covenant is all the enemies of God's people underneath the feet of the seed (22)**
 - **22:17—and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies.**
 - For the first time, not only is Abraham/seed blessing and fathering nations but now the seed is POSSESSING THE GATES OF THE ENEMIES.
 - **Immediate Context—Israel will enjoy military success.**
 - **Theological Context—Genesis 1-11 reminds us that the Serpent is the ultimate enemy!**
 - The ultimate demonstration of possessing the gates of the enemy is that all the enemies of God are put underneath the feet of the seed.
 - **Hebrews 1:13—and to which of the angels has he ever said, "sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?"**
 - **1 Cor. 15:24-27—Then comes the end, when he silvers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.**
 - This is the hope we profess and hold on to each week as we celebrate communion—the coming day when this promise to Abraham regarding his seed comes into completion!