

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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GOD'S OVERHAUL OF ABRAM

Genesis 17

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Here are the three points to the message today:

- God's overhaul of Abram came with two marks.
- The two marks of Abraham reminded Satan of his sure doom.
- Abraham's laughter praised God and mocked Satan.

Let's review:

- God called Abram to go on a journey.
- Abram learned many lessons on faith and obedience.
- God made a covenant with Abram that he would be the father of many nations.
- In spite of Abram's immaturity and disobedience, God sought him out.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 17:1-8/15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ² And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous."

Let us note that Abram probably thought he had blown it with God by having a child with Hagar. We see here, once again, that God sought out Abram. God himself came to Abram after he had disobeyed. God, once again, showed mercy and reinforced the covenant. And what was Abram's response? Let's look in verse 3.

Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations."

I want to include verses 15 and 16 here because it is very important that we acknowledge Sarah was part of the blessing as well.

¹⁵ God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Now back to verse 6: *I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ 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. ⁸ And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.”*

GOD’S OVERHAUL OF ABRAM CAME WITH TWO MARKS

In previous chapters, God had already given Abram a promising future: the father of many nations, kings, land, and so on for future generations. We’ve heard all that before. Abram had heard it before. The new part of it all is that God changed his name.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 17:9-14

God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. ¹³ Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

EXPLANATION: Not only did God change Abram’s name, but God altered him physically. For as long as I can remember, I’ve heard about Abraham’s circumcision and that of the Hebrew people, but I never quite understood it. It seems odd that this was a requirement of God and that it became a requirement for all boys.

In a conversation with a pastor friend, along with some of my own study, I want to share with you what I’ve decided.

Let’s look at a prophecy from the Lord in Genesis 3:15. After Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God followed with a curse. Read with me his curse toward Satan. *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Here the word “seed” is used to mean offspring. God says “her” which means Eve. The ultimate seed of a woman would be Jesus Christ, which is prophesied in this chapter, but how exactly would that happen? I do not believe Satan knew how it would happen and he did everything within his power to keep it from happening.

The offspring of Satan and the offspring of Eve would fight according to verse 15. Satan saw a simple solution to ending the seed that would someday crush his head: get Cain to kill Abel.

Eve had three offspring that we know of: Cain, who killed his brother Abel, and then Seth, who Eve said in Genesis 4:25 was “another seed appointed for her instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.” Here we have the word “seed” again. If Satan could get Cain to kill Abel, then Cain would be of Satan’s seed, spiritually speaking, and he would kill Abel, which would kill Eve’s seed, physically speaking. But God had another plan, and that was through Seth. Genesis 3 tells about the seed of a woman and now in Genesis 17, we hear about the seed of a man.

In Genesis 17, the Hebrew word for seed, zar ‘a ka, is used in some form at least seven times in this chapter. It refers to offspring and “future generations”.

He did not give him a tattoo. He did not brand him. He required Abraham to be circumcised along with all males, which made them physically different than the rest of the world.

THE TWO MARKS OF ABRAHAM REMINDED SATAN OF HIS SURE DOOM

Now when Satan heard the name Abraham, he'd be reminded yet once again of this man named by God himself. Just like Saul of Tarsus... here's a man who was controlled by Satan and when God got a hold of him, he changed Saul's name to Paul. Every time he heard the name Paul, Satan would be reminded that God named him.

Not only would the name changes of Abraham and Sarah remind Satan that God named them, but from now on, when yet another boy was circumcised, Satan would be reminded once again of his defeat... that the seed of Eve had passed along through to the time of Abraham and Sarah and somewhere out of this race of people, the Messiah would come. Circumcision was taunting to Satan. Anytime a Hebrew woman and man had intercourse, Satan realized this might be it. The Messiah might be conceived. But he wasn't thinking of Mary being conceived of the Holy Spirit.

As the tribe grew and became twelve tribes, as they became a great nation of hundreds of thousands, with all the men circumcised, Satan lost more and more control over trying to stop the Messiah from being born.

Satan had to hear the names. Satan had to see the physical change as a sign of the covenant over and over.

With the birth of Jesus, something incredible and unique happened. Abraham's seed was definitely a part of it. Mary was a descendant of Abraham and Sarah, but the seed that impregnated Mary was not that of a man. She was conceived of the Holy Spirit and so the prophecy of Eve's seed -- the seed of a woman -- in Genesis 3

would be fulfilled.

An important aside here: Many times I've noted how outsiders were included in the family of faith. Right here, from the first day of this part of the covenant, outsiders were included. Boys who were not part of Abraham's DNA, but were bought, were included as one of the Hebrew children if they went through this ritual. Of course, the idea of buying children is repulsive and illegal today, but this was a tribal time and of course, if a child joined Abraham's people, he'd have a much better life than growing up in other cultures.

Including outsiders in the family of faith through the mark of circumcision further reminded Satan of his doom and his inability to control all things.

ABRAHAM'S LAUGHTER PRAISED GOD AND MOCKED SATAN

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 17:17-21

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" ¹⁸ *And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!"*

¹⁹ *God said, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him."* ²⁰ *As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.* ²¹ *But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."* *And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.*

Satan is glad when any of God's children lose their way and stumble. The temptation that Sarai and Abram fell into with Abram having the child through Hagar was exactly what Satan wanted.

But God had another plan. Any time God's children lose their way and stumble and then repent, God has a plan to renew and restore. Repentance should bring about

sorrow, followed by joy that the repentant sinner has been restored.

Witnessing that God had restored him, hearing the promises from God once again, and hearing that he'd father a child in his old age with his wife in her old age, brought joy to Abraham – he laughed. He laughed with rejoicing at God's goodness and without knowing it, his laughter mocked Satan at the same time.

APPLICATION: Anytime we repent and have the joy of our salvation renewed, we mock Satan with our joy. Let's rejoice in the Lord for his goodness and thereby mock Satan. Let us sing songs loudly and thereby mock Satan. Let us read the scripture and thereby mock Satan.

ILLUSTRATION: You've heard me say this, but before I came here, a few well-meaning people encouraged me not to come. Other long-time friends encouraged me to come. One of the negative things I heard was it's an older congregation with limited potential. Really? What's that got to do with anything? Let's be reminded of the ages of Abraham and Sarah.

If it's God's will, this older congregation may have the largest building program in the state going on before long – and I hope we'll all laugh with joy like Abraham did.

CONCLUSION: What happened with the covenant of circumcision? Circumcision was a sign of the covenant. However, with many, it lost its meaning and became a source of pride over time. When Jesus came, the covenant had been fulfilled and circumcision lost its meaning, and the Apostle Paul spend a lot of time dealing with the issue.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 2:25-29

Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. When Paul wrote that, no doubt he offended many! ²⁶ So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the

written code and circumcision but break the law.²⁸ For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical.²⁹ Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 7:19

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

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