

ABRAM HAD THE COVENANT RECONFIRMED BY GOD: AROUSED FAITH — STIRRING EXPERIENCE WITH GOD GENESIS 17:15–27

Introduction

Abram was desperate. He had been wanting a son ever since his marriage to Sara, and they most likely had been married for over fifty years. Thus Abram's longing — his hopes and dreams — to have a son had been gnawing at him for over fifty years. But Sara had been unable to bear children. In desperation, when Abram was an old man, Sara had suggested that Abram take her maid, Hagar, and try to bear a son through her before it was too late. This Abram did, and Ishmael was born. Abram's dreams for a son were finally realized in Ishmael. Did Abram ever expect to have another son, a son other than Ishmael? Not likely, for he was now ninety-nine years old, and Sara was eighty-nine, both well beyond childbearing years. Abram was well aware of this fact; verse 17 tells us this. Apparently, Abram had felt that Ishmael was the son promised by God, that God was going to fulfil His promises through Ishmael. Abram loved Ishmael dearly. Note verse 18, where Abram cried out for God to remember and bless Ishmael. Ishmael was thirteen years old, and because of Abram's life-long desire for a son, he no doubt loved Ishmael more deeply than the average father. The bond between them was probably closer than the bond between most fathers and sons. Apparently, Abram had become comfortable and settled in life, somewhat complacent and lethargic, slumbering and slacking off. Abram just accepted reality: he was too old to bear any more children, and Ishmael was the only child he had. Thus, he felt Ishmael was bound to be the son promised by God.

But as this passage so clearly reveals, this was not God's plan. Ishmael was not the promised seed, not the son promised to Abram. Thus, Abram's faith needed to be aroused once again. Abram needed God to arouse — stir, quicken, awaken — his faith to look beyond Ishmael...

- beyond the present
- beyond the physical
- beyond the possible

Abram needed to be renewed, to look at the impossible and to believe in the miraculous power and works of God. Note how this is exactly what we need. When a believer becomes comfortable — at ease, complacent, and lethargic — in life, he needs to be aroused by God. He needs a fresh, stirring experience with God similar to Abram's experience. This is the subject of this important passage: *Abram Had the Covenant (Promises) Reconfirmed by God: Aroused Faith — the Steps to a Fresh, Stirring Experience with God, Genesis 17:1-27.*

- I. Step 1: receiving a fresh revelation from God: God is the Almighty God (v. 1).
- II. Step 2: making a new commitment to walk before God and to live a blameless, perfect life (vv. 1-2).
- III. Step 3: humbling oneself before God and listening to God (vv. 3-5).
- IV. Step 4: hearing and believing God's covenant or promises (vv. 6-8).
- V. Step 5: keeping the covenant and sharing in the ritual of the covenant: keeping its meaning always in one's mind (vv. 9-14).
- VI. Step 6: changing the relationship to one's family (vv. 15-18).
- VII. Step 7: accepting the will and purpose of God (vv. 19-21).
- VIII. Step 8: making a public decision and obeying God's instructions, His Word (vv. 22-27).

I. *Genesis 17:15–18 Abraham's Family, Sara*

How can we arouse our faith, have a fresh, stirring experience with God? It is by changing our relationship to our family.

1. Note that God honoured Sara, greatly honoured her. Did Abraham harbour feelings against Sara, secretly blaming her for not being able to bear children? Did he treat her like he should, in love and respect? Was his relationship with her as strong as it should have been? We know that he mistreated her on two occasions, once before this encounter with God and once after (Gen 12:11-16; 20:2-18). Whatever the case, God honoured Sara, and He instructed Abraham to so honour her.
 - a. God gave Sara a new name, "Sarah," and He told Abraham to call Sara by that name. "Sarah" means *princess*. Abraham was hereafter to look upon Sarah as a princess, and he was to call and treat her like a princess. Some scholars say that "Sara" means *strife, contention, quarrelsome*. (Herbert Lockyer. *All the Women of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967, p. 155; H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, Editors. *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 236). If so, then the name change to Sarah (princess) was of extreme significance to Abraham. Whereas his wife's name had signified strife and contention, now her name was to indicate the traits and character of a princess.
 - b. God blessed Sarah and appointed her to bear the promised seed (v. 16). Note that God said He would bless Sarah twice. And then Abraham heard the very words he had waited all his adult life to hear: Sarah was to bear him a son. And not only a son, but she was to be the mother of nations (plural); kings of peoples (plural) were to come from her.

Note the plural: only one nation, the Israelites, ever descended from Sarah. This must, therefore, refer to the spiritual people, the promised seed of believers from *every nation*, who were to believe God and His promises even as Abraham had. Sarah was, most definitely, to bear nations and kings of peoples (plural), bear the nation of Israel

and the new race of believers from every nation of the earth. Sarah, Abraham's wife, was honoured by God, greatly honoured. Consequently, Abraham was to change his behaviour, his relationship toward his wife: he was to call her *Sarah*, the princess, a woman worthy of honour from all the nations and kings of the earth.

Thought 1. Every husband should treat his wife with respect and love, especially if she is a true believer and follower of God. The Christian wife has the promises of God at her disposal. She can claim God's promises and bring great blessing upon the family. Thus, she should be treated as the princess of the family and household.

Thought 2. If the Christian husband wants an aroused faith, a fresh, stirring experience with God, he may need to change his relationship with his wife. He may need to change his behaviour toward her, begin to treat her with a renewed love and respect, treat her as the princess of the home.

Eph 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

Col 3:19 *Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*

Thought 3. Warren W. Wiersbe says this about mothers:

Motherhood should be highly esteemed, and the birth of a baby welcomed with joy. While God does not call all women to marry, or all married women to bear children, He does have a special concern for both mothers and children (Psa 113:9; 127:3-5; Mat. 19:14). In a selfish society, too many people see motherhood as a barrier and children as a burden. In fact, some people consider children such a burden that they destroy them before they have an opportunity to become a blessing.

*The womb of the mother is a holy of holies where God is at work (Psa 139:13-18). How tragic that we turn that womb into a tomb, that holy of holies into a holocaust. (Warren W. Wiersbe. *Be Obedient*, p. 71)*

2. Note that Abraham worshipped in astonishment and prayer (vv. 17-18). He fell to his face again, utterly astonished, laughing with joy and rejoicing flooding his heart. A believer who has been broken, truly broken, while God is flooding him with assurance knows what Abraham was experiencing. He was astonished, just amazed that such a thing could be. Note that he thought to himself, wondered at what he had heard:

“How can Sarah and I have a child? I am one hundred and Sarah is ninety years old. Such is just too wonderful to be true. But it is true, for God has promised it.”

But then, within just a few moments, Abraham thought of his son Ishmael, the only son he had ever known, the son who was then thirteen years old and whom he had grown to love, the son whom he had thought was to be the promised seed. It dawned upon Abraham that his relationship with Ishmael was being changed, that Ishmael was not the promised seed. He had been wrong about Ishmael: all his hopes and

dreams had been wrapped up in the boy, misplaced and out of line with God's will. Immediately, Abraham cried out for God to also bless Ishmael, that God would not forget the son whom he loved so much, that God might let Ishmael live under His very special blessing (v. 18).

Thought 1. Every father should love his children as Abraham loved Ishmael, and he should cry out for God to bless his children, to bless them in a very special way. In fact, a father must love and pray for his children before God will ever arouse his faith, before God will ever give him a fresh, stirring experience with Himself.

Eph 6:4 *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Col 3:21 *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

1 Pet 3:7 *“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. [by application, the same would apply to children.]”*

II. **Genesis 17:19–21** *Accepting the Will and Purpose of God*

How can we arouse our faith, have a fresh, stirring experience with God? Accept and surrender to the will and purpose of God. As stated above, Abraham's dreams had been wrapped up in Ishmael, misplaced and out of line with God's will (see note, *Introduction*, Gen 17:1-27; also note, pt. 2, Gen. 17:15-18). Abraham needed to see — clearly see — the will and purpose of God, and he needed to willingly accept and surrender to God's will. Thus God reconfirmed His will and purpose; He drove His will into Abraham's heart:

- => Sarah was to bear a son, the promised seed (v. 19).
- => the son was to be named Isaac (note that God Himself named the son, v. 19).
- => the covenant established with Isaac was to be an everlasting covenant (v. 19).
- => Ishmael was to be blessed, especially blessed, in answer to Abraham's prayer:
Ishmael was to become a great nation of twelve rulers (v. 20).

Note that God reconfirmed His will a third time in verse 21: the covenant of the promised seed and promised land was to be established with Isaac, not with Ishmael nor with anyone else. The promised Saviour was to come through Isaac and his descendants, the Jews. As Scripture clearly says, “Salvation is of the Jews” (Jn. 4:22). Note also that God set the time for Isaac's birth: he was to be born about one year later (v. 21).

Thought 1. We must follow the example of Abraham: accept and surrender to the will and purpose of God. Whatever God calls us to do, we must do it. We must surrender to His will for our lives. This is the only way we can ever have an aroused faith. God cannot give us a fresh, stirring experience with Himself unless we surrender to His will.

Psa 40:8 *“I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”*

Psa 143:10 *“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”*

Prov 23:26 *“My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways.”*

Luke 9:23-24 *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

Luke 14: 33 *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*

Rom 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Gal 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

III. Genesis 17:22–27 Decision and Obedience to God’s Will

How can we arouse our faith, have a fresh, stirring experience with God? Make a public decision and obey God’s instructions, His Word. Note: as soon as God had finished speaking with Abraham, Abraham got up and acted: he took his whole household and did exactly what God said to do. He obeyed God’s instructions, God’s Word. His decision was made public, for God’s instructions were to involve the whole household.

1. Abraham led his whole household to obey God, to enter into the covenant relationship: all the men and boys were circumcised (v. 22).
2. He took the lead, setting the example in the covenant relationship at an old age: he was circumcised at age ninety-nine (v. 23).
3. He led his own child to obey God, to enter into the covenant relationship — at the early age of thirteen (v. 25).
4. The account is re-emphasized: to stress the importance of the covenant relationship (v. 27).

Thought 1. Every adult should make a public decision and obey God’s instructions, His Word. And every adult should lead his or her household to obey God, to enter into the covenant relationship with God: to accept the promised Saviour and the promised land of heaven. If we want God to arouse our faith, to give us a fresh, stirring experience with Himself, we must obey His Word. We must publicly act on His Word, witness and bear testimony to our household.

Mark 5:19 *Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”*

Acts 11:13-14 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, “Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.”

Acts 16:14-15 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

Acts 16:31 “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.” ■