

# **Genesis 17:15-27 – A Vain Attempt to Change God's Plans**

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Poole, Pulpit, Delitzsch, Henry, Gill, Calvin, PASN, Trapp, Geneva, JFB, Whyttock, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: It is good to have good doctrines and Reformed churches have the best doctrines of all. But it is often hard to apply those doctrines to your private life, especially when those doctrines are distasteful to the flesh. For example, all Christians are against abortions, the murdering of the innocent, but when a pregnancy adds stress to one's body, one's freedom and one's wallet, abortion 墮胎 seems more reasonable and is often done. Second example: You know a believer must not intermarry with a non-believer, but when you find someone you really, really like, it is easier to push that doctrine aside because you really want to satisfy yourself. But God demands full obedience in doctrine and life; the execution of his commands really matters... Life and doctrine have to match. This is what God wants you to hear today.

Our headings are: **Encouragement to Meet God's Requirement, Evading 回避 the Requirement Because of Doubt, and Executing the Requirement through Surrender.**

Our goals are: **That you will learn to use the signs of the Covenant, baptism and the Lord's Supper, as a means of grace to strengthen you in your Christian walk.**

## **Encouragement to meet the God's Requirement**

15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 "And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."

1. The first way God encouraged Abraham to faithful living was by changing his wife's name from Sarai to Sarah. Remember, a name change is common when something remarkable happens...like when someone gets married, or gets a big promotion. (Pope's, for instance, can take any name they want when they become Pope.) Sarai, 'noblewoman' or 'princess' became Sarah 'princess of a multitude.' She is called Sarah, because many children would come from her womb and even many kings. Remember, kings would usually come from previous royalty.
2. More specifically, Sarai would be blessed significantly through her own son. This meant that Ishmael was not the chosen one.
3. And notice how the blessing of God on Sarah was repeated – blessing of a son from her own body. The Lord repeated the blessing for double confirmation.

## **Evading the Requirement because of Doubt**

17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

1. Because of Abraham's doubted that God would fulfill the promises he made, he laughed at God's words. **His laughter** may have been to be cynical, we don't know for sure. What we do know is that it was bad and evidence of doubt. Abraham showed his lack of faith in the promises of God. He was convinced that he and Sarah were too old to have children. It is true that Paul said that Abraham did not doubt God, but that was saying that Abraham did not continue in doubt. When God reassured him that his Word would come true, Abraham believed it. (V23-27)
2. One interesting thing here is that Abraham thought sinfully in his heart, but God revealed to him that there were no secrets that he did not know. Then God rebuked his doubt. But before God revealed Abraham's doubt to him and rebuked him for his doubt, he allowed Abraham to say one more foolish thing. What was that foolish thing from Father Abraham's mouth? Verse 18...

18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"
3. Abraham proposed 提议 to God, since he believed that Sarah would have no children, that God accept Ishmael as the chosen one – the one through whom Christ would come to die to save the world.

Abraham ignored the sinful lifestyle of Ishmael and his mother. But what could one expect from someone who has doubts. This is true today as well. Doubting that God would provide and take care of you may lead you into many sins. If you doubt that your marriage would survive, you make plans for after marriage and you make no good effort to save your present marriage. If you doubt you would find the right person to marry, you hide yourself from the public and never find anyone. If you doubt you would ever serve as a leader in the church, you will not make the effort to study and be properly equipped. The list is endless. Doubt destroys.

19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. 21 "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year."

4. After hearing Abraham's thoughts and words, God rebuked him and said that Sarah would have the child. (This proves that Abraham did not laugh for joy.) And God gave the child a name – Isaac – which means laughter. See the irony there. God wanted Abraham to remember that he laughed at God's promise. And sometimes you have to live your whole life with the knowledge and consequences of one of your sins as well. God makes you remember your sins so you stay away from that sinful situation in the future...and you also become a warning to others.

5. This son from Sarah and Abraham would be the father of the everlasting covenant – a covenant that you are a part of even today. And Isaac would multiply and fill the whole earth – not physically, but through Jesus Christ. He would spiritually multiply.

6. God gave a specific date to help Abraham's doubt. Abraham needed to learn what Paul taught.

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Someone says: I'll help you in the future, or I'll help you tomorrow at 9. Which do you prefer?

22 Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

7. We cannot pass by this verse without noticing the close relationship God has with his people. He converses with Abraham and Sarah and yet establishes his holiness – going back into heaven, unlike pagan Gods who are either fearsome – like the Moslems' god, whom they dare not call "father." Others see their gods as dependent on them and begs them for worship. Jehovah is close to his children and yet independent of them – needing nothing from them.

20 "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.

8. And yet, because Ishmael was Abraham's son, God would be blessed also – though not as intensively and extensively as Isaac. His blessings were more temporal – earthly. Hagarenes, Saracens, and Turks came from Ishmael. But Isaac had temporal and heavenly blessings as well. And even recently, I read that the kings of the Arabians have twelve names.

### **Executing the Requirement in Full Surrender**

23 So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; 27 and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

1. It is not uncommon for a wife, after she is married to not care as much about the way she looks. And it is not uncommon for a man to become lazy - or show his real self after he is married. But that is

not what you see here with Father Abraham. **He took his son and every male in his household and circumcised** them. Maybe this was where the Psalmist got the idea to write...

**Psalm 119:60** – I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.

Are you that quick to take up your responsibilities God has given to you...especially to put the mark of the covenant on your children and then teach them the requirement of the covenant? Abraham knew what his responsibilities were to his household and he lived up to God's demands. It took a while to get there...but he did not delay once he knew clearly his duty.

**2. It seems that Abraham circumcised himself. It is remarkable that he didn't say: Let's see how this works out first for others – if it were painful- then I'll decide whether I will do it. And this was a man of 99 years. Calvin said: [Abraham] did this with one foot in the grave... Abraham did not think about how this might be shameful. Further, you can imagine that most men would have thought about postponing this for another day because of the pain and inconvenience. (You know like how some delay surrendering their lives to the Lord until they are old – as they want to enjoy the sinful pleasures of life first.) Not so with Father Abraham. He circumcised his himself and all those with him. He was committed to living for the Lord.**

**3. Keep in mind that circumcision was not by force to the adults, but by instruction and conviction of their hearts. You might expect that those who refuse God were later refused by Abraham also.**

**4. Now let's think about this for a minute. After the first man was circumcised...and he screamed, do you think it was easy for the next person to come forward? And when the 284<sup>th</sup> man was circumcised and screamed, do you think the 285<sup>th</sup> looked forward to it? Yet, they did it because this was the mark God wanted to put on them...and it was a sensible mark with good intentions and benefits.**

**5. And can you imagine what the Canaanites might have thought of this practice? How they must have laughed and mocked.**  
But Father Abraham was not worried about that.

**1Corinthians 1:27** But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

**6. And can you imagine the danger of being exposed to the heathens while sick and recovering? This was a real danger.**

Sadly, it was Abraham's great-grandsons who would use this knowledge of sickness from circumcision to destroy those who were circumcised.

**Genesis 34:24** And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city. 25 Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males.

But Abraham trusted in God, and committed himself to him, and had his fear before his eyes,

**Romans 4:20** He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,

## **Conclusion:**

**God gave Abraham faith to trust him and walk in front of his face in obedience – which means he had faith in the Christ. In order to strengthen that faith so Abraham would live obediently, God promised him many children...and great quality in children: His name was changed. Sarah's name was changed. And all males would have a permanent sign on their body to remember God's promises and be assured that he would fulfill them all – the physical and especially the spiritual promise of salvation. Today you saw how Abraham fully trusted God (after his attempts to divert God's plans) and let God place the sign of circumcision on him and his family.**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: First, **do you see the love and patience God** has with his children...how he carries them along in their faith? Praise him for that. Specifically, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper and when we see a baptism, let that remind you of all what God has promised and let that assurance nourish your soul. Second, **do you realize that Jesus Christ was your circumcision?** His blood was shed. His life had to be forfeited – die - so that you could live. So Christ's promise is sealed to you. Serve him for that. Third, **do you have the same kind of zeal to obey?** Zeal to evangelize, zeal to listen to the sermons and prepare to listen to the sermons. Zeal to give to the needy. Zeal to sing. Zeal to pray?

Finally, to not know Jesus is the single most disastrous decision you have made in your life (and it is your decision to not know him), because those who don't know him will die alone in their sins. But it doesn't have to be that way. You can know him in a most personal way by asking God to accept Christ's death as your death. He will not only give you faith to receive that...but he will give you many tokens of his love to daily strengthen your faith.