

Encountering God: Trusting His Promises

Genesis 17:1-8

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 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. 8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

In this passage there is a definite challenge to Abram to move to a new level of trust and faith. At a time when Abram may have thought that his best years are behind him, God asks him to move up. This call to move higher reached Abram at a point of weakness and inability. It is amazing to consider that when we think it is all over, God may be thinking about beginnings.

(AD LIB)

Abram is now ninety-nine years old. It has been twenty four years since he received God's promise and left the land of Ur. It has been thirteen years since the events recorded in the last chapter (Gen 16). So far as we can tell God has not spoken since He encountered Hagar on her way to Egypt. Thirteen years of silence!

Thirteen years earlier Abram had taken a wrong turn and for thirteen years there has been silence from heaven. We have reason to suspect that these were years of unhappiness and unrest in the household of Abram. The presence of Ishmael in the home created contempt and bitterness, envy and strife. God used these thirteen years to teach Abram the cost of acting on his own. Time used to teach Abram of the consequences of serving God in the flesh and acting presumptuously. For thirteen years he has lived with the fruits of his impatience.

It could be that you have had some similar experience. Most of us do. A time when God has allowed you to have your own way, and the results have been distressing. You are permitted to go your own head-strong way that you might learn the folly of acting apart from God. One of the most frightening things in life is that if you insist on having your own way, God may let you have it, until you are sorry you asked for it

This text is about having confidence in God...trusting in his promises... exercising faith...despite Abraham's age...despite his failures.

This text captures an encounter that Abraham has with God.

The Bible says that the Lord appeared unto Abraham and speaks to him...reminding Abraham that he is God, giving him a command, reminding him of the promise that he made to Abraham.

This is not the first encounter Abraham has had with God.

We see in Chapter 12 of Genesis that God speaks to Abraham and tells him to leave his home, relatives and his country to go to a place that he will show him. God promises to make a great nation out of Abraham and to bless him, make his name famous and make him a blessing to others.

God promises: "I will bless those who bless you. I will curse those who curse you. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

WOW! What a promise. I get excited because that includes me!

We are engrafted into the promise by the blood of Christ!

Hebrews 6:13-20 says,

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." [a] 15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. 16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might [b] have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

So here we are five chapters later, much time has passed...Abraham is still waiting on the promise (or not) ...he has left home **at the age of 75**, (with his wife and nephew Lot), takes all their possessions, travels to Canaan and has a temporary setback...There is a famine in the land. So they end up in Egypt for a while.

During his time in Egypt (before he settles in his permanent home), he messes up.

Afraid that the Egyptians would want his wife and kill him, he tells Sarai to say that she was his sister and not his wife.

She goes along with the program and she becomes a part of Pharaoh's harem and Pharaoh treats him well (sheep, oxen, he-donkeys, she-donkeys, camels, menservants and maidservants.)

But God intervenes with plagues upon Pharaoh and his household.

Pharaoh discovers the lie and kicks Abram and Sarai to the curb. (Get out and take your stuff with you!)

Abraham goes back to Canaan and dwells there. By chapter 15, he encounters God again in a vision and reminds God that he has not fulfilled his promise..."Look , You have given me no child ; and a servant born in my house is my heir."

God says, this man shall not be your heir, but he who shall come from your own body shall be your heir.

He took Abraham outside and said, "Look toward the heavens and count the stars- if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your descendants be."

And once again, Abraham believed in (trusted in, relied on, remained steadfast to) the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness (right standing with God) ...Genesis 15:6

Abraham believed but he had questions. (expound)

Some time passes...Abraham and Sarah have been in Canaan 10 years now and still no child. Sarah becomes embarrassed perhaps, frustrated, maybe blaming herself, feeling less than a wife...she suggests that Hagar their servant have intercourse with Abraham so that she can become pregnant and produce a son for them. And so it happens... resulting in Ishmael. Sarah becomes jealous and upset...the Bible says she was full of contempt. (Who does this heifer think she is?) She kicks Hagar out... pregnant with the child that she wanted her to have.

The angel meets Hagar out in the street and sends her back home and tells her to submit to Sarah. The angel of the Lord promises Hagar that her son will have many descents as well. She is to name him Ishmael meaning God hears...because the Lord has heard and paid attention to your affliction.

The angel of the Lord also said that Ishmael will be as a wild ass among men: his hand will be against every man and every man's hand against him.

We see that today in the Middle East...we see that in the terror attacks throughout the world carried out by the descendants of Ishmael.

Just like Abraham had lacked faith and leaned to his own understanding when he lied about Sarah being his sister, his wife now lacks faith and leans to her own understanding (along with Abraham).

Ishmael is the consequence.

But despite all that God encounters Abraham again in our text in chapter 17.

Despite our unbelief, our doubts, our fears, our mistakes, our rebellion, our disobedience...God continues to encounter us anyhow so that we can grow in our faith...so we can develop trust through our relationship with him.

Abraham had heard the promises before but he did not act favorably. So God repeats himself...he reiterates his promises and makes it clear who he is.

This encounter with God provides...

I. A New Revelation of God

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.”

After thirteen year of silence, God appears to Abram and says, "I AM God Almighty" In Hebrew the name is "El-Shaddai," which essentially means "the God who is sufficient" and is used to emphasize His infinite power.

He is saying, I am sufficien!.. I will provide!

It is the first time that God has been called by this name.

How great is our God, El-Shaddai? How mighty is He? What can he do? In the very next chapter God again promises the son and fixes the time for his arrival. Genesis 18:14

(NKJV) The angel says to Sarah and Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." That is an excellent question, "Is anything too hard for God?" The answer is, of course not, He is El-Shaddai, Almighty God. The prophet Jeremiah says, Jeremiah 32:17 (NKJV) "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You."

The contemporary Christian song made famous by Amy Grant back in 1982 puts it well, "El Shaddai, El Shaddai, El El Ya Na, Adonai, age to age you still the same by the power of the name."

How great is our God, El-Shaddai? An angel comes to a young woman named Mary and tells her that she is with child and that He shall be the Messiah. She asks, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" Luke 1:34 (NKJV). The angel responses with, "For with God nothing will be impossible." Luke 1:37 (NKJV) Why is this possible? Because He is El-Shaddai, Almighty God.

With this new light comes a new demand from God, "walk before Me and be blameless." In the King James Version this word blameless is translated "perfect." The root meaning of this word is "wholehearted." If Abraham wanted to know God's power, he had to walk, that is live, close to the Lord and be blameless, that is consistently responding to God in repentance and faith. He must be sincere and honest in his devotion and obedience to the Lord. Faith always calls for obedience if it is to be counted as real.

Seven promises are given by "I will statements"

1. I will make my covenant with you (v. 2)
2. I will multiply you (v.2)

3. I will make you fruitful (exceedingly) (v.6)
4. I will make of you many nations (v.6)
5. I will establish my covenant with your descendants (v. 7)
6. I will give you (and your descendants) the land of Canaan (v. 8)
7. I will be their God (v. 8)

The second thing this encounter provides is...

II. A New Name for Abram and Sarai

“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.” (v. 5)

For twenty-four years Abram had been living under the shepherding hand of God. Abram was not the same man in character that he was when God first called him. Through out the Bible, when character changes significantly, God changes the name. Now God challenged Abram to a closer walk with Him by changing his and Sarai’s names. The name Abram means “high father or father of many.” This must have proven to be an embarrassment many times over the years to Abram. Whenever he met someone new, he was forced to introduce himself, Abram the father of many. It must of happened hundred of times, each time is was more galling than the last. “Oh, you name is Abram, father of many! Congratulations! How many sons do you have?” How And for years the answer was so humiliating, none. And now he was the father of one and that by a servant girl. How he must have hated the question.

Donald Barnhouse told of a man he knew that had the last name of Wrench. He told Barnhouse that he divided his acquaintances into two groups (1) those who did not make wisecracks about his name and (2) those who did. “He said that he automatically cringed when anyone would hear his name and begin one of the wisecracks he had heard in every possible variety; was he related to Monkey Wrench, was he the left handed wrench, and all the others.” (quoted by James Montgomery Boice. Genesis: An Expository Commentary. Vol 2 Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985] p. 129). Abram would have understood very well how he felt.

“In Hebrew God added one letter to Abram’s name, the letter formed by breathing. In Hebrew, the name Jehovah is formed by the five vowels. I, E, O, U, A, with the twice repeated H. The word for spirit, which means breath, is ruach in Hebrew, which is pronounced by expelling air. God was adding His name to Abram.” (Donald Grey Barnhouse. Genesis: A Devotional

Exposition. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975] pp. 133-134.) The best explanation is that God took part of his own name and added to Abraham and Sarah's names.

"Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name." Genesis 17:15 (NKJV)

The name Sarai means "contentious." This speaks volumes about the home life of Abram and Sarai. Solomon writes "it is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in house shared with a contentious woman"(Proverbs 21:9).

Having a thousand wives, Solomon no doubt knew what he was talking about. Sarai was a problem wife. Yet in the New Testament Peter says that this woman is a model for all women to follow, but only after her name is changed to Sarah, which means "princess." She is never referred to as Sarai in the New Testament. God does not set her forth as a pattern for women until she becomes Sarah and loses her contentious spirit. As Sarah she learned to develop "a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious" (1 Peter 3:4).

She was not naturally this way but she learned by God's grace to be such. I suspect that Sarai was argumentative, the classic nagging wife. But through the years by God's grace she learned that she did not have to defend herself on every occasion and she became Sarah, a princess, honored among women.

Last, this encounter with God provides....

III. A New Covenant Sign

"This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;" Genesis 17:10 (NKJV)

With Abraham God's sign of covenant was to be circumcision. In the New Testament, the covenant sign is baptism. Neither circumcision nor baptism was the means of salvation. Salvation in the Old Testament and in the New Testament was "by grace through faith." A whole chapter is written in Romans (chapter 4) to show that salvation came to Abraham years before he was circumcised, so all would understand that act in itself had no saving merit.

Abraham's faith resulted in obedience. Verse 23 says "that same day" Abraham was obedient in carrying out the commands of God. Whatever God said, Abraham listened, believed and obeyed.

The lesson of the Gospel is Abraham's challenge all over again. It is a call to a deeper relationship. I want you to think of the Christian life within the framework of three calls,

1. The call to repentance and Faith. Mark 1:14-15 (NKJV)

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, (15) and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

2. The call to discipleship. Luke 9:23

“Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

3. The call to go forth as a laborer. Luke 10:1-2

“After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. (2) Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

Have you responded to his call?

CONCLUSION:

Abraham believed God. Paul says of him, “And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. (20) He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, (21) and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” Romans 4:19-21

(NKJV) What made the faith of Abraham and Sarah great was not they believed that they could do great things with God’s help. **Rather, they believed that God could do whatever he wanted to do with them or without them. God would do great things simply because he chose to do so.**

Do we have a faith like that? Do we serve a God like that? The God we worship is the God of Abraham, God still works in men to bring forth faith like Abraham’s. This God is able to bring life out of death, love out of hate, peace out of turmoil, joy out of misery, praise out of

cursing and strength out of weakness. He is still El-Shaddai, Almighty God and there is nothing he cannot do.

How Do We Acquire Faith? Because faith is based solely on God's promises, only one source exists for biblical faith—God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing , and hearing by the word of Christ"

God's Word reveals His will. It is only when we know God's will that we can believe it. So, if you want to have faith, you must hear (or read) God's promises.

Faith does not come by praying for it, fasting for it, or having someone lay hands on you to bestow it. It only comes from hearing God's Word. And once you hear it, you still must make a decision to believe it.

Beyond the acquiring of faith, our faith can also grow stronger. The Bible mentions various levels of faith—from little faith to mountain-moving faith. Faith grows stronger as it is fed and exercised, just like a human muscle.

We should continue to feed our faith by meditating on God's Word. We should exercise it by acting and reacting to everything based on God's Word. This includes those times when we face problems, worries and concerns

God doesn't want His children to worry about anything, but rather to trust Him in every situation.

Matthew 6:25-34:

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life[a]?

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But

seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Philippians 4:6-8

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

1 Peter 5:7

7 cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Refusing to worry is just one way we can exercise our faith. If we truly believe what God has said, we will act and talk as if it's true.

If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, you will talk and act like a person who believes it.

If you believe that God will supply all your needs, you will talk and act like it.

If you believe that God wants you to be healthy, you will act and talk like it.

Ro 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

We must be fully persuaded that God will keep his promise.

Ga 3:7: Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

We are the seed of Abraham, Abraham was a friend of God, so we can be a friend of God.

Ga 3:6: Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

If He has promised you something, then He is able to bring it to pass.

Trust in His Word, believe in what He says.

Know that “with God all things are possible” even when it looks impossible.

God will take impossible situations and will make something good take place.

Hold onto your God-given dreams and never let go. In God’s time, if you stay faithful to Him, He will do what it is that He has spoken to you.

I did not say that we would never mess up. Abraham did but He believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

There will be times after God speaks to you that you will mess up, but if you continue not to give in to the temptations that come against you, and live for Jesus He will bring to pass what has been revealed.

Jesus said in John 10:27, “ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

We are the sheep of God and we can hear His voice. God knows us and we have to continue to follow Him.

Abraham was a friend of God and so we can be a friend of God.

We become His friend by taking His Word and living what He says to do.

The closer I draw nigh to God, the closer He will draw nigh to me.

With each encounter with God, we develop confidence in Him and learn to trust his promises.

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,

*Just to take Him at His Word;
Just to rest upon His promise,
And to know, "Thus saith the Lord!"*

Refrain:

*Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er;
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
Oh, for grace to trust Him more!*

*Oh, how sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to trust His cleansing blood;
And in simple faith to plunge me
'Neath the healing, cleansing flood!*

*Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just from sin and self to cease;
Just from Jesus simply taking
Life and rest, and joy and peace.*

*I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee,
Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend;
And I know that Thou art with me,
Wilt be with me to the end.*