

SERMON GUIDE

Genesis: Faith in the Promises of God

Genesis 17:15-27



SERMON NOTES

Exegesis

V 15 – *And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.”*

The Lord just changed Abram’s name to Abraham (17:5). Now, he changes Sarai’s name to Sarah. In the Bible, when the Lord changes someone’s name, it usually means God has purpose for that person, and the name is tied to their new identity. So, for example, Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter, because Peter means rock, and Jesus said on this rock I will build my church.

So, the Lord always has purpose when He changes someone’s name, and the same is true for Sarah. The names Sarai and Sarah mean princess. So, why change the name if they mean the same thing? Because, upon closer examination, Sarai means “my princess” whereas Sarah means “a princess.” That might seem insignificant to you, but commentators believe the difference is huge. One writer said, “Sarai signifies my princess, as if her honor were confined to one family only; Sarah signifies a princess, namely, of multitudes.”

It's one thing to call someone “my princess” it’s another thing to actually be a princess. I call my daughter “my princess” but she’s not really a princess. I wish she were. Things would be a lot different for me. But she’s not really a princess.

Sarah really is a princess, because kings and nations shall come from her. Verse 16,

V 16 – *“I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”*

Princesses give birth to kings, and that’s exactly what Sarah will do. God plans to overcome Sarah’s barrenness and give her a son. God promised Abraham a son, and he assumed it would be by Sarah,

but this is the first time Sarah is specifically named as the mother of Abraham's promised descendants. Sarah would be the mother of all Israel. The Messiah would come from her line. Abraham and Sarah are the Patriarch and Matriarch of God's people.

These are incredible promises. So incredible, they're almost unbelievable to Abraham.

V 17 – “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “*Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?*”

“How is this possible, God? I am 100 years old. Sarah is 90. We're too old for children.” Some people think Abraham's laughter and questioning is a sign of unbelief. But I don't think so. In the very next chapter, Sarah laughs when she hears the promises of God, and the Lord rebukes her for it. The Lord doesn't rebuke Abraham here. It reminds me of the gospel account when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and Mary announcing the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus. Both of them questioned the angel but only Zechariah was rebuked because his questioning stemmed from unbelief. Mary's question came from faith. Abraham's laughter and questions are like that of Mary; they stem from faith! Matthew Henry said, “Abraham showed great joy; he laughed, it was a laughter of delight, not of distrust.”

We know this is true because in Romans 4, Paul says this in verse 18, “In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.” In John 8:56, Jesus said Abraham was looking forward in faith. “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”

Abraham trusted God, but his faith isn't absent of doubt. This becomes evident as he proposes an alternative plan.

V 18 – “And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!”

“Lord, can’t you just let Ishmael be the son of promise? Can’t he be the one to whom I pass on the covenant?” Abraham believed God, but he also had reservations. Do you ever feel that way? Be encouraged that the Abraham, the man of faith, was not without flaws.

Abraham’s suggestion is not only an alternative to God’s promise. It’s also his plea for God to take care of Ishmael. If the covenant promises are going to be passed on to a future son, what happens to Ishmael? The Lord will address that, but first He wants to make His plans very clear.

V 19 – God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.”

Abraham proposes Ishmael as the promised son. The Lord says no, Isaac will be the promised son. Ironically, the name Isaac means laughter. Both Sarah and Abraham would have a permanent reminder of the time they laughed at promises of God.

God’s chosen people will be established Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Ishmael. Remember what Paul said in Romans 9. “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.” Through Isaac, God will establish His people chosen by grace. But that doesn’t mean God forgot Ishmael.

V 20-21 – “As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”

This is God’s common grace. Though Ishmael did not receive the covenant blessings, he was still blessed in an earthly sense by the Lord. Ishmael had many descendants who are, to this day, the Arab people. Muslims claim Muhammad was a direct descendant of Ishmael, which is fitting. Because

Ishmael was not a believer and Muhammad was a false prophet. This concludes their conversation for now.

V 22-27 – “When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

The Lord finishes speaking with Abraham and ascends to Heaven. And Abraham wastes no time obeying God. In verse 1-14 of this chapter, God instituted the covenant of circumcision. Every male was to be circumcised if they were a part of the covenant community. Abraham sees to it personally that every male in the household is obedient to the commands of God. Paul takes note of this event in Romans 4 in his argument on justification. His point there is that Abraham was circumcised after he believed God's promises and received God's imputed righteousness; thus, proving his faith, not his works, is the ground for justification. Abraham's life is one of remarkable faith, and we can learn a great deal from him. Let me give you four things to take away from this passage.

Application

1. Trust God's promises despite your doubts.

When Abraham heard that Sarah would bear him a son, he proposed that Ishmael become the promised son, not Isaac. To him, that seemed more plausible than him and Sarah having a child at their age. Abraham is an example of a man who had faith mixed with doubt. It's important to remember that doubt is not the opposite of faith. Unbelief is the opposite of faith. It's possible for a Christian to have solid faith with the occasional mixture of doubt.

William Carey is known as the father of modern missions. He discerned the call of God to take the gospel to India. Carey believed God's promises that Jesus would be with him, and that the gospel was the power of God to save. Once in India, however, Carey experienced extreme hardship. His son, Peter, died. His wife struggled with mental illness, and he had trouble learning the language. On top of all that, he faced opposition from the locals, and he didn't see a single convert for the first seven years.

During this time, he wrote in his journal about his struggles. Had God really called him to India? Can the gospel really change lives? Carey experienced doubt. I am sure, at times, he wanted to quit and go home. But by faith, he persevered and continued the work, and over time, Carey's work saw incredible fruit. He translated the Bible into other languages, established schools and laid the foundation for future missionaries. Faith is not always absent of doubt. Faith pushes forward, clinging to God and His promises.

2. Trust God even circumstances seem impossible.

God made incredible promises to Abraham and Sarah. Land. Descendants. World-wide blessings. Divine blessing and protection. But the one promise that made them stumble was the promise of a son. Abraham was 99. Sarah was 90. Even for God, this seemed unlikely. But they believed God even when their circumstances seemed impossible. Faith trusts God even in impossible situations. If you have never read the biography of George Mueller, you need to get a copy. In 1836, Mueller opened an orphanage in England. He had no wealth or guaranteed funding, and now he must care for dozens of children.

It is said that Mueller never asked for donations. He simply relied on God to provide. One morning, he had no food to feed the children breakfast. So, he gathered all the staff and children together to pray. In his prayer, Mueller began thanking God for the food they were about to receive. As they finished praying, they heard a knock at the door. The local baker said God told him to take bread to the children. Shortly after that, the milk man's cart broke down right in front of the orphanage and he gave all his stock to Mueller so he could fix his cart. Mueller faced an impossible situation, but by faith he trusted God to provide. I wonder what impossible situation you're facing this morning. Does it feel like

there is no good solution? Take your concerns, doubts and fears to God. He cares for you! He alone can provide a way.

3. Accept God's plans, even when they don't match your own.

When God promised Abraham and Sarah a promised son, Abraham proposed Ishmael to be the heir. But God was undeterred and reaffirmed His plans to make Isaac the son of promise. Abraham had his plots, but it was God's plans that would prevail. Some people think being a means God is obligated to bless their plans and goals. They think, "If I am a good person and do what's right, God should bless what I have planned." And then they're devastated when God's plans differ from their own.

Back in 2009, my plan was to become a police officer. I applied to the Marion County Sheriff's Dept. in Indianapolis. I passed all the tests and thought for sure I'd get the job, but I didn't. All I got was a letter stating I hadn't been selected. I was crushed. But it was at this time, God spoke very clearly to me. "Brandon, that is not what I have planned for you." God crushed my dreams and called me to ministry, and I am so glad he did, because God's plans are so much better than mine. Do you believe that? What if nothing you have planned for your life actually happens? What if God has something completely different in mind for your future? Will you accept His plans by faith? Faith accepts God's plans, even when they're not our own.

4. Demonstrate your faith through obedience

How did Abraham respond to God's promises and commands? He obeyed the word of the Lord and had every male in the household circumcised. Obedience is faith in action. This is why James can say, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works." A lot of people think James is contradicting Paul. As if Paul taught justification by faith and James taught justification by works. But that's completely wrong. James is simply telling us that Abraham's faith was demonstrated through his works. It's the works that justify that claim to faith.

This is important for us. You can say you have faith, but do your works prove that you have faith? Faith without works is a dead faith. Martin Luther said, "I am justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies

is never alone.” It’s accompanied by works. Do you have those works? Is your faith made manifest by your good deeds?

Ultimately, everything in this passage is fulfilled in Jesus. Kings would come from Sarah. Jesus is the King of Kings, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Isaac was the promised son. God sent His own Son from Heaven who came to redeem sinners like Abraham, Sarah and Isaac. Abraham trusted and obeyed God. Jesus was obedient to the point of death. Jesus never wavered in His faith and devotion to God. And when faced with an impossible situation, and the temptation to choose His own will over God’s, Jesus said, “Not my will but your will be done.” His faithful obedience took Him to the cross where all the promises of God were revealed.



- How was your week? What is one thing you’re grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



- **REVIEW**
 - Read **Genesis 17:15-27** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
 - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
 - Additional Scripture:
 - John 8:56
 - Romans 4:19
 - Romans 9:6-13
 - Galatians 4:23
 - Galatians 4:28
- **REFLECT**
 - Why does God change Sarai’s name?
 - Why did Abraham laugh in verse 17?

- How does the context of Isaac’s conception contrast with Ishmael’s?
- What is the significance of circumcision as the sign of the covenant?
- **RESPOND**
 - Is there an area of your life where you have not been trusting the Lord?
 - Is there an area of your life where you need to practice obedience?
 - What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?
- **MEMORIZE**
 - Psalm 113:3 – From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised!



- **BUILD UP:** How will you follow Jesus this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him? We have several discipleship opportunities for you to participate in.
 - **MDWK** is a time of education and growth in order to build up the Journey Church body. We offer a handful of intentionally chosen classes that cover a broad range of topics and are taught by quality teachers from within our congregation. Classes are at 6:30p every Wednesday.
 - **TJC Women** seeks to equip women to be rooted in the Word of God and bold in their faith. Our events and small groups focus on letting the gospel shape all spheres of our lives. Gather is the first Saturday of every month.
 - **TJC Men** exists to build up men for the good of the world, the growth of the Kingdom, and the glory of God. The men’s ministry meets on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 8:00a.
 - **TJC Students** is passionate to see every parent equipped, every leader developed, and every student disciplined into baptized, self-feeding, disciple making followers of Jesus who are letting the gospel shape every sphere of their lives. Our student ministry meets on Wednesday nights from 6:00p-7:30p for MDWK worship and Sunday mornings at 8:30a and 10:00a for small group.
 - **TJC Young Adults** exists to equip young adults ages 18 to 29 in becoming passionate followers of Jesus who enter their life on Christ. We do this through intentional relationships, fellowship and worship centered around the gospel. The Fount meets every Tuesday at 7:00p.
- **SEND OUT:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story or the gospel? We have several opportunities for local and foreign missions.
 - **Local opportunities:** Serving international students at Cumberland University, serving the homeless at Compassionate Hands, supporting our local missions – Reach out to Jeff Long for more information

- **Foreign opportunities:** 2025 trips to the Philippines, Turkey, Rome, Indonesia, London, and Israel – Reach out to Shawn Casto for more information
- **PRAYER**
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - **Staff** – Braden Benz
 - **Role** – Worship and Creative Associate
 - **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
 - **Pray for our short-term teams**
 - Central Asia Team #2 departing on September 27
 - **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>