

Light On Our Path



*Messages by various speakers mostly on the
book of Genesis at the Streetlight Mission Church
in the 11:00 a.m. services of August 2007*

Table of Contents

August 5, 2007
Pastor Chris Bosch

Text	Title	Author	Page #
Acts 2:39	<i>God's Great Promise to Believers and their Children</i>	C. Bosch	4
Matthew 5:5	<i>Blessed Are the Meek</i>	T. Zekveld	18
Genesis 15:17	<i>God's Covenant with Abram</i>	P. Aasman	26
Genesis 17:7	<i>The Covenant of God</i>	P. Aasman	31

Acts 2:39 “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

God's Great Promise to Believers and their Children

Reading: Genesis 17: 1-8; Ezekiel 36: 24-29a; Acts 2: 29-41
Text: Acts 2:39

Today is a very special day for Streetlight church. True, every Sunday, or every Lord's Day (for that is a better word for the first day of the week) is special because Jesus Christ gathers his church. Every Lord's Day is a day of celebration for we remember that it was on the first day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead!

Today is very special, however, for it is the first time that we have seen a baby baptized here. That is a very great blessing, not only for the parents, but for Streetlight church as a whole. For the church confesses that ,“*by baptism we are received into the church of God...*” (Belgic Confession art. 34) In this, Jesus Christ shows his great love and favor to us all! And that is surely reason for rejoicing!

Now in the days of our text, the church at Jerusalem had every reason to celebrate. For the day of Pentecost had “fully come” (Acts 2:1, King James translation). With power and majesty, God the Holy Spirit had been poured like a mighty

waterfall on the congregation of about one hundred and twenty believers.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, had boldly proclaimed the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ: crucified, dead and buried but raised from the dead and ascended in triumph at God's right hand. The hearts of his hearers, a huge crowd of God-fearing Jews had been "cut to the heart." Hearing Peter's message, they realized they too were guilty of the death of Jesus because of their sins. So they had cried out "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Then Peter had told them to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus, for the forgiveness of their sins. In doing so they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!

But how could they receive God's gifts? Were they not unworthy? How can those who deserve to be condemned be crowned with God's rich Spirit? In our text the Lord used Peter to speak of God's covenant of grace and mercy to believers and their children - that all believers, throughout the generations might be comforted, encouraged, and directed to serve Jesus Christ. That the church of Christ might not only be preserved but might grow, and for that purpose let us hear God's Word, which says to us this morning,

The promise is for you and to your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call.

We hear of:

- 1. The wealth of this promise**
- 2. The width of this promise**
- 3. The way of this promise**

1. The wealth of this promise:

"For the promise is to you..." It is a grand and wealthy promise indeed. Grand and wealthy because Peter's call for repentance and baptism "for the forgiveness of sins" recalled the gracious foundation or ground for that repentance. Besides, it gives the assurance of that gift of the Holy Spirit of which Peter spoke, that life-giving Spirit who was so active and visible on the day of Pentecost.

Those God-fearing men of Judea, that "house of Israel" which had been "cut to the heart," needed to hear of that promise. They needed to hear it on the basis of God's Word. Let's not forget where that multitude had been. I don't mean geographically (in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Rome), but spiritually in relation to Jesus Christ.

Though they were devout, God-fearing men, they really had been strangers to the Lord and his promises. The message they heard of Christ crucified, raised, and ascended was entirely new to them. Though they had busied themselves with many man-made laws, they had not lived in the hope and gladness of God's Word.

Now here was a man who spoke of “the promise.” “*The promise*” “to them,” i.e. for them and with them. He spoke of it as if it was a treasure, a family heirloom. In doing so he jogged their memory. That he might remove their ‘spiritual cobwebs’ as it were. That they might recall the wealth of that treasure.

They knew something of what Peter was talking about, for no one said, what do you mean? Which promise, where? We know it too, don’t we? For “*the promise*” is nothing else but that gracious covenant word which God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob long ago. That sure Word we read in Gen.17 in which God promised that He would make Abraham the father of a multitude of nations. With it, the Lord said that He would be their God - their God who would give them priceless possessions. Priceless!

You know that the wealth and worth of a gift is inseparable from the wealth and worth of the giver. Receive a lovely gift from a neighbour and it is one thing. Receive it from a king and it is quite another. What value would you attach to that gift if by it the giver-king promises to give Himself? Now the promise given to Abraham and to His descendants was the promise of everlasting life, given by the God of life.

That promise left no room for doubt. It was no “maybe” like the “maybes” of mortal men who, though well intended, often fail to make good the least of their promises. No, this promise is the promise of the Lord God Almighty, who holds the whole world

in His hand! That God established His covenant even with our first parents, Adam and Eve in Paradise. In His grace he promised to send a Savior to deliver His people from the curse of sin and death (Gen. 3:15).

Those God-fearing people were surely familiar with the Scriptures. So they knew that the whole OT is saturated by the promise of the Lord. That promise was not one of earthly possessions, the prospect of a good job, a quiet life, long-lasting health, and a happy family. No, God’s people were told that this promise was to sustain them, even when they had to go through the valley of the shadow of death. This promise of this God was to be before them when they crossed rivers, and fought pitched battles with God’s enemies.

Yet it was an immensely rich promise, for it spoke of God’s covenant grace and favour. That favour in which the Lord had set His heart on Israel to make them His possession. To love them out of all the families of the earth. And to give them the forgiveness of sins and life, everlasting. To give them sure hope, that the curse of sin would be removed, that righteousness would be theirs in Christ who was to come.

Righteousness in Christ, the treasure of a clean slate, a right relationship to the Lord, the comfort of close communion, with the Lord.

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter had laboured to show his hearers that God's Word was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He'd quoted David in Psalms 16 and 110. David who spoke of Christ when he said, "*The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.*" (Ps. 110:1)

Listen closely and you will hear of that Saviour every time God gives his promises to those who belong to Him. I think of what God said to Abraham in Gen. 12 "*I will bless you, and make your name great, and.... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed...*" That blessedness was the promise of the forgiveness of sins, in Jesus Christ, without which there is no blessing. It was the promise of deliverance, from the curse of sin and death. It was God's sure covenant Word concerning the righteousness of Christ, put on Abraham's account, by grace through faith.

In that grace God loved Israel "*out of all the families of the earth.*" Not at all because they were better or more favourably inclined to listen to Him. On the contrary! For Abraham and Isaac and David and Israel were not better than the nations round about. Despite their stubbornness of heart and their resistance to His will, God came to them giving the promise of crown jewels: forgiveness of sins, righteousness, salvation in the blood of Christ. A promise of an Only Comforter in life and death. A sure promise concerning thrones and dominion, victory over all God's enemies, even the last enemy, death.

God did not leave it at that. There was that promise of the Holy Spirit not just to a select few, but to many - to all those who would repent of their sins and receive that holy visible sign and seal of God's promise. In the Old Testament, that sign was the blood sign of circumcision. It involved a physical cutting away of a piece of flesh and it stood for the cutting away of sin. A blood sign, because it pointed to the blood that would have to be shed for the forgiveness of those sins.

We read something of that wealthy promise concerning the Holy Spirit in Ezekiel 36. In it God said, "*I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*" (v.27) That prophecy called for repentance on the part of God's people, and it spoke of a sprinkling with clean water on them. What was that but a picture of holy baptism that was to come? Baptism, which is a picture of the washing away of our sins by the blood of Christ. God's own testimony that those with whom he made that covenant would receive His Holy Spirit to live in them. That by grace, through faith, they might be assured that all their sins are washed away. Assured as well, as we heard in the Form for Baptism that one day true believers "shall finally be presented without blemish (i.e. pure and holy) among the assembly of God's elect in life eternal.

But now the people who heard this promise had to know also this: the richest promises will do you no good unless you

believe them! If you doubt them or worse, turn your back on them and neglect them, God's promises can turn around to curse you instead. Peter knew that. That's why he called those God-fearing, believing Jews to repentance. Yes, they were God-fearing, but they need to believe in Jesus Christ, for outside of him no one can be saved.

And even when you believe in Jesus Christ, sincerely we still need to repent from the sins we do daily. We still need to get on our knees and ask God for forgiveness. Yet the wonderful, amazing thing is that God remains true to his word. Though we often fail him, with our pride and selfishness and our unbelief, he still says, "yesterday and today and tomorrow, return to me and I will return to you. Believe in me, and the promises I made way back then, which will surely come true in your life. For the promise is to you, believers, and to your children."

What a comfort and what a joy and what encouragement for those who live today, for those who receive children from God's hand. But also for singles, for young people as well as for elderly folks, and even for those who have led shameful lives. For you and me, sinful from the wombs of our mothers.

Yet, if we believe, we are the richest people in the world. Were you baptized, once long ago perhaps, in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Cling to that God and serve Him from the heart. Believe in Jesus Christ. Believe God's sure Word,

God's promises as so many Jews did on the day of Pentecost. On that day, no less than 3,000 accepted the Word they heard and were baptized and so were added to the church. Three thousand in one day!

The wealth of God's promise has not diminished. Today, Jesus Christ is still gathering his church, right here as well as in many other places in this world. He does so in exactly the same way as he did on the day of Pentecost, by His Word and Spirit. Through the faithful preaching of the Word.

No then we do not boast of ourselves. We are like that man, a poor sinner in the Bible who said, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief." We boast of our God and Saviour, who in His great love did not limit his promises to a few, but to many, even to those who were and are "far off," as many "whom the Lord our God will call."

2. The width of God's promise:

To have a great treasure promised to one person, or even to one family is a marvelous thing. To know it extends to a number of people no one can count is knowledge beyond words. To believe that it is given to former aliens, (not Martians but people who once were far removed from God and his Word) is truly amazing.

Now the grace of God is very deep and very wide. You see and hear of it on the day God made His covenant with Abraham

and with his offspring. Time and again, God repeated that promise concerning the families of the earth who would be blessed “in Abraham” and in his descendants.

Families, nations even. For the God of the covenant is a most rich and merciful God. Though for a long time He restricted His covenant love to one nation, Israel, He wanted His promise to be made known to the ends of the earth. So we don’t only hear of individuals who were not of the nation of Israel but who nevertheless were joined to God’s people: Rahab and Ruth and Naaman the Syrian. But God spoke in Psalm 46:10 saying, “*Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations...*” and again in Psalm 96:7 “*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.*”

Not only do the psalmists prophesy concerning the nations that will be heirs of the promises concerning Jesus Christ, but the prophets time and again speak of nations streaming into the Lord’s holy temple (or church). Just before our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, he gave his disciples the order to go and “*make disciples of all nations baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” (Matthew 28:19)

To be sure, for a long time Israel alone was God’s cherished people. God said to them, “*You only have I chosen from all the families of the earth.*” (Amos 3:2) Yet all the while, the Lord was making his way to the day that he would open his

treasures even to Philistia and Tyre and Ethiopia (Ps. 87). So, the prophets spoke of “*peace, peace to the far and the near*” (Isa.57:19), so the Lord’s dominion would be “*from the River to the ends of the earth*” (Zech. 9:10).

Those promises began to be fulfilled at Pentecost. These were testimonies concerning the widening of Jacob’s tent, the expansion of God’s covenant promises. Surely it was further testimony to the grace of God. “*For the promise is to you and to your children.*”

They were believers by God’s grace alone. Of themselves, like we, undeserving people. Like Israel, people who “multiplied transgressions,” nations where “justice was turned back” and righteousness stood “far off.” Yet people who in God’s grace would also hear of his peace and of his healing Spirit, people with whom Jesus Christ is busy today, pulling them out of the misery of unbelief and superstition, to come to his light. Not because they deserve it, but because God is so very, very good. Amazing Grace, indeed!

So Jesus Christ took down what the Bible calls “the dividing wall” between Jew and Gentile, that people who were “far off” (not just miles away physically but those who were far removed from God spiritually because of their sins) would be drawn into close communion with God by His Word and Spirit.

Let us stand in awe of the width, the breadth of God's love the wide extent of his promise. Where would we have been if the Lord had extended his promise to the Jews alone? Where would we be, if God's Word had not gone out? If it had not moved from Jerusalem to Samaria to Rome and to the world, we would all be lost and without hope in the world.

But listen, "*The promise is to you and to your children and to those who are far off.*" To be sure, those promises must be believed. Our lives must be faith-lives and we must all do faith works. Not because we could ever pay God for what he's done for us or because we can earn our salvation, but out of great thankfulness. Because we realize that when God makes a covenant with believers and their seed, there are also covenant obligations that we owe to God simply out of love for and thankfulness to him for his great gifts.

We are to rejoice in the wealth of his promises, to take them on our lips and to confess the faith with them. To "*declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*" (1 Peter 2: 9), and to love Christ and his church and to really live as children of promise. In doing so, we honor the way of the Lord and trust and obey his call.

3. The way of that promise:

I think we have already seen quite a bit of that way. It is nothing else but the way of God's Word. That Word which reveals

the Christ, who is the Way and the Truth and the Life. When the Word of that Christ and the Christ of that Word call, then that call is most effective. Then lives are changed. Then people are cut to the heart and cry out for direction on the path of life. Then God's call to repent and believe is honored and lives are changed. Then the word creates its own territory, then the Holy Spirit, makes fertile ground. By His grace! Then children of men are transformed into children of God. Then heaven rejoices and hearts are made glad.

That is the way of God's call, always and only through the Word. Not through some warm fuzzy feeling, nor through some magical experience, but through the Word, which is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Romans 1:16).

No then, it is not the worthy who are called, for the Lord himself said he did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance (Matt. 9:13). God's call is not a haphazard tossing around of the name of Jesus. It is a call that is full of God's effective purpose, to save and redeem, from sin and shame.

The amazing thing is that when God the Holy Spirit goes to work with his Word lives are truly changed as they were on that day of Pentecost so long ago. That same Holy Spirit with the very same Word still does wonders today. God still calls to himself those whom he's set apart for himself in his very great love.

Now the question is, when we hear His voice, will we listen and humble ourselves and obey? Will we join those who on the day of Pentecost were “cut to the heart” in realizing their sins? May it be that we will trust the Lord of promise, and truly believe.

Then we may rejoice. For the call of God has gone out to the ends of the earth. He did not pass us by, and did not write us off. Also here, in downtown Hamilton, Christ Jesus is establishing his church. Praise God, for also here many are taking steps to better know God’s Word, and so one day profess their faith in Jesus Christ. Also here, the Holy Spirit has given his gift of holy baptism for the strengthening of our faith. Let us pray that before long also here that other sacrament, the Lord’s Supper may be celebrated.

All praise and thanks to God, who keeps his word of promise today, tomorrow and forever. Blessed be the Lord, for he so glorious, he alone does wondrous things. O God, on all the earth our chorus, with Amen, Amen rings!

August 12, 2007
Written by Rev. Tony Zekveld
Read by Richard Bultje

Matthew 5:5 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Blessed Are The Meek

Reading: Psalm 37:1-11
Text: Matthew 5:5

What does it mean to be meek? Does it not mean to be humble, gentle, considerate of others, and not standing up for ones wants? Do you think a person is born meek? I know from my children they are not. They will fight for their toys very easily. How does a person become meek? Usually from hard times or being humbled. Who are some people you consider to be meek?

The meek inheriting the earth - how is this possible? We would expect the opposite; the proud and the strong seem to inherit the earth! Don’t the powerful, the prosperous, have the earth? Or so it seems - they have the earth now. They get what they want and they often get it through their evil schemes. They are the loudest and the strongest, so they get ahead. Do you ever notice that they flex their own muscles, push their own agendas? They are in control of the earth! They get their way!

But it won't always be that way. Our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5:5, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" The followers of Jesus are the meek. They have a difference in attitude and destiny from those who have the earth now. Keep in mind that Jesus followers have:

1. A difference in attitude (vs. 5a) that is a different way of looking at others and things.
2. A difference in destiny (vs. 5b) that is a different future than those who do not follow Jesus.

1. The Difference in Attitude

Picture this scenario: you are in the grocery store and the line up is long at the cash-counter. Suddenly, three or four people push themselves into the front of the line. They say they are in a hurry and they step right in front of an elderly couple.

Is this a picture of meekness? No, it's the exact opposite! The word "meek" means, gentle, humble, considerate and not promoting yourself and pushing for your wants. Being meek is having a fruit which the Lord Jesus gives by His Spirit to those who trust in Him as we read in Galatians 5:22-23. The meek are those who endure suffering, injustice in the proper way; that is, with gentleness, and not trying to control things. Meekness doesn't mean that they are weak and timid. Jesus was meek, but he was not weak or timid. The meek don't make a lot of noise when injustice is done against them. They don't get "bent out of

shape" over it. They trust in the Lord. They have God's promises. But the wicked don't, and that's why they make the noise they do. They only have this earth - that's all! But the meek followers of Jesus do have something to look forward to.

The difference of attitude between the meek and the wicked is seen in Psalm 37. This Psalm was written by an older man (probably King David) who also had to learn to walk in the way of meekness. He had learned this from experience. That is how all followers of Jesus learn to be meek - by turning to God and not to themselves in times of stress.

The Psalmist exhorts us, "*Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity*" (vs. 1). The wicked get ahead by pushing others around. They get a good mark and get all the awards. They get what they want by force of strength. You have tried your best and yet they got what they wanted and you didn't. Don't be envious. Some bribe and cheat to get where they want to be in the world and get ahead. They prosper because of their own wicked schemes (37:7b). In doing so, they often push the meek down and therefore the meek often suffer injustice. The meek often ask : God am I not one of yours? Did you not promise to help me? Why do the unrighteous get ahead while I am struggling?

God answers all these questions by saying, "don't fret or get bent out of shape when men succeed in their ways. Stop being

angry, and turn from your wrath. Do not fret or get upset with wicked people getting what they want while you suffer.” You might be asking yourself “how is that possible? How can I remain meek when wicked people get what they want and I suffer?”

God also tells us why we should not get upset: “Those wicked schemers will be cut down like the grass . . . evildoers shall be cut off.” The injustices you receive in this life are only temporary. Deliverance will come for the meek followers of Jesus. In a short while, you will look carefully for wicked man’s place but it will be no more. They trust in themselves and so do not put their trust in God. They trust in their own clever methods to get ahead. They use the courts to get ahead and resort to violence. They yell and scream and try to push others out of their way. They demand their rights.

I hope you are not like this. If you are sometimes, I hope you realize that is not good to be like that. I hope you fight that attitude. Look at verses 3-7: Trust in the Lord. Do good. While living on the earth, trust that God is faithful. Delight yourself in the Lord. Commit your way to Him, your life, your work, your family. Trust in Him. Trust that God will make things right and justice will come in time. Patiently wait for God’s time to make things right. In doing this, you will become meek and so receive a great blessing.

Do you know that there is no need for God’s children to worry? Why? Because “*The meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*” In Matthew 5, picture our Lord Jesus, raising His hands and pronouncing His blessing on the meek: “*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth!*”

The meek see that they do not deserve anything because of their own sins. They are amazed when people think of them as well as they do. And this makes them humble, gentle and sensitive towards others. To use our earlier illustration: they won’t step in front of others in the grocery line. They will let an older couple step in front of them. They will let others get ahead. Those who trust in God, show their meekness in all of life’s circumstances.

The meek followers of Jesus not only have a different attitude than the wicked, they also have a different future.

2. The Difference in Destiny

The wicked, who trust in themselves and their own schemes, will be cut off forever. In a short while, they will be no more. But the meek, they **shall** inherit the earth, yes, this earth!

The meek do not lash back; take revenge against those who commit injustices. They do not easily take things to court. They trust the Lord will take care of all them. “‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Rom. 12:19). The meek see, by faith, something so much greater than the present world with its

injustices. They see their place in the new earth. The meek have a quiet confidence that God will keep His promises: the meek believe they will inherit the earth, and they are blessed already now with this confidence and expectation!

And how will the meek inherit this earth? By means of a revolution! Will it be by an earthly revolution that the meek will gain control of this earth? No, no, no. This is the way of the wicked. We have seen lots of examples of revolution in the world, but this is not the way of the Lord.

Notice, *“for they shall inherit the earth.”* If you receive an inheritance from your parents, you are the legal heirs of what they give you. It belongs to you. You did not earn it but you are its true, rightful owner. In the same way, the meek shall inherit the earth because God is their Father and Jesus is their Savior. Not by revolution, but by divine intervention, God gives it! The meek do not earn it, it is a gift given to the meek. Those who trust in the Lord Jesus alone for their salvation will share in the things Jesus has. Jesus is the owner of earth. Believing in Jesus mean’s Jesus will share the earth with you. True, it is in the hands of others for now. But the meek are the legal heirs of this earth and life eternal! Why?

The Lord Jesus gained this inheritance for His meek followers. The Lord Jesus won the battle over Satan. Jesus won this world from Satan. Jesus did this by offering His own life in

perfect obedience to gain this earth and life eternal for His meek followers.

You may remember that Jesus did not enter into Jerusalem on a horse, a symbol of might. No, he is our meek Savior, lowly and sitting on a donkey (Matt. 21:5). When he suffered injustice, he did *“not quarrel nor cry out”* (Matt. 12:19). The path that Jesus took was the path of humiliation and suffering, even death - death on the cross. Jesus bought this inheritance for us with His own blood. Jesus’ resurrection shows that He is its rightful owner. He won the battle. Heaven and earth belong to Him. The meek, those who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus have an inheritance waiting for them. They will inherit this earth with Jesus.

When will this fully happen? When Jesus returns at the end of the world. Revelation 21 describes this new earth. Only then will there be no more injustice and the wicked will be no more. Trust what God tells you. God, who created the earth and continues to be one in control, promises his meek followers the great blessing of owning the earth. Do you believe God has the power and desire to give this to you? Through Jesus Christ, God has secured the earth for his meek followers.

Do not fret over the wicked who seem to have so much now. The meek who trust in Jesus will be given the world. Not because the meek are so good, but because they humbly look to Jesus as their Lord and Savoir and see that Jesus has won the battle also for

them. Believe Jesus has won the battle, and you, too, will be one of the meek follow of Jesus, who will inherit the earth.

August 19, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Genesis 15:17 “When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.”

God’s Covenant with Abram

Reading: Genesis 15
Text: Genesis 15:17

This coming Tuesday, Ed and Ruth will be celebrating their 38th wedding anniversary! They were married in the year 1969. That is a long time ago. Congratulations! That is a rare thing these days for people stay married for so long. Why is it that so many marriages break up? It is because people are not faithful to their marriage vows. They make promises, but when it begins to get difficult to keep those promises, people give up and get divorced. That is not a good thing. So all the more, we are happy with Ed and Ruth’s anniversary and we celebrate with them.

But now I ask you, who decides to get married - the husband or the wife? Of course, they decide together. And who really needs to keep the promise of marriage - the husband or the wife? Of course they must both keep their promises. They are partners in the covenant of marriage. They decide together, and they have the same duties toward each other - especially to love each other no matter what they feel like doing.

Now, all those who belong to the church of Jesus Christ, have a relationship to the triune God. Who decides to enter into this relationship - you or God? Not you or me. God does. Jesus said, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you”* (John 15:16). And Luke writes about the Christians in Antioch that *“all those who were appointed for eternal life believed.”* (Acts 13:48)

In the story of Abram, God is at the front of nearly the whole covenant relationship. God came to Abram and he said (vs.1) *“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”* Abram responds with complaints and doubts in vs. 2: *“O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”* Abram even has made a decision that showed how weak his faith was (vs.3): *“You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”*

Abram’s relationship with God was not growing stronger but weaker, so God encourages Abram in vs. 4-5: *“Then the word of the LORD came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.’ He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”* At last Abram responds the way he should to God in vs. 6 *“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”*

Abram believed God, even though he didn’t have much to go on. He and Sarah were very old, but he believed that God would give him many children. How in the world God will do it Abram could not possibly know, but God was assuring him now. So Abram believed. That is all God wanted from him. That is all that God wants from you too. If you look around, you don’t have much to go on. Will Jesus really come back and take us to himself? Will Hamilton harbour really become fresh and clean, will the air pollution really be gone? Will hatred, fighting, poverty, diseases, sin and grief all be removed by God? It hardly seems possible. But Abram believed God. So must you. For God, that is enough. You have sinned much but if you believe in God’s love, he will wash away all your sins through Jesus Christ, and he will right every wrong, cleanse every filthy thing.

But then God did something that is just so amazing. Absolutely amazing. After settling the child-business, God started talking about the land in vs. 7: *“I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”* That was too much for Abram. He really found that difficult to believe (vs. 8): *“O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”* This was an important thing. Again, it seemed impossible, but it was important to God, and if God wants something, he gets it. The land was important. This land. So to drive the point home, God did something really

amazing (vs. 9): “*So the LORD said to him, ‘Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.’*” What did God want to do with them? Verse 10: “*Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.*”

Then God revealed that sure, there would be trouble. Abram would not receive the land right away, but eventually his descendants would. And then who walked the path between the pieces of the animals chopped in half? Verse 17: “*When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.*” What do you think that means? That is rather difficult. You need to turn to another place in the Bible to find out: Jeremiah 34:18-20 “*The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.*”

Do you see what happened here? God walked alone between the pieces. God says he will destroy himself if he ever proves false to the covenant. What is more important than

anything else is that we understand and believe that God is faithful to his promises. Abram is not a righteous man in himself. Remember what he did with Sarah while in Egypt? Why, Abram cannot even hold onto his faith without wavering. He cannot be the anchor of the covenant.

God is. His commitment to us is what matters. Yes, we have to commit ourselves to God, but how weak and feeble that is. Let no person here rely on his own promise. We need to rely on God’s promise: He will destroy himself before he ever fails to keep his word.

And you know what? Because we were so incredibly unfaithful, God even sent his own Son into the world to become a man so that we might do the work that was needed to save us. He even allowed his Son to be destroyed, under the curse of hell! God thus saved us so that we might be the great nation of children from Abraham.

Let us put our faith in God. You will not be disappointed.

August 26, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Genesis 17:7 “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”

The Covenant of God

Reading: Genesis 17:1-14
Text: Genesis 17:7

What are the two things that God promised to Abraham in the covenant? God promised children and land. Was Abram happy about these promises God made to him? Of course he was. What happened that made him sad? Well, a lot of time passed and it became difficult for Abram to keep on believing God's promises to him. So what did God do to help Abram to keep believing and being happy in the things God promised? God renewed his promises - sometimes by just appearing to him and repeating his promise, once he acted in a ceremony in which several animals were cut in half and God walked alone between the pieces. We saw last Sunday that this meant God was calling down a curse on himself if he should fail to do what he had promised Abraham - as though God were saying, “Let me be treated like these hacked apart animals if I do not do what I promise you.”

Here we are in chapter 17. Abram now was almost 100 years old. Sarai his wife was a little younger (by 10 years - see vs 17). How do you think they were feeling about the promise to have lots of children? Not very good! How could they still have children? Sarai was too old to have children now. Paul wrote in Romans 4:19 that Sarah's womb was dead. It was impossible for her to have children.

So Abram and Sarai are beginning to wonder: Is God really Yahweh? You remember, I hope, what Yahweh means. God himself explained what it means: “*I am what I am*”, that is, “*I will do what I promise; I am what I reveal myself to be.*” So Abram was wondering: Will Yahweh really do what he promises? Or is Yahweh just one more god or power that makes many promises but does not live up to them? Have you ever had that before? Someone promised you things that were very important to you, but you waited in vain to get it?

What does that do to your relationship with that person? You don't trust him. Friendships have been broken that way. Partnerships have been lost. Abram had given up everything to have a relationship with God - because God had made him rich promises. But now Abram's relationship with God was very strained. Yahweh had not lived up to his promises yet. How can Abram continue to walk with Yahweh now?

We all ask ourselves that question from time to time. Why hasn't God fixed this problem in my life yet? Why do I feel alone all the time? Why has Jesus not returned yet? We've been waiting 2000 years already! God wants to have a good relationship with you, but it can only rest on God's promises to us, not ours to God. We are not in control here, God is. When we are in control, we always do what Adam and Eve did, we abandon God. God will not let that happen. Our relationship with God depends on his promises, from first to last.

As Abram's relationship with God is getting strained, God came to him and said (vs. 2), "*I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.*" And how did God confirm that covenant with Abram? By circumcising every male in his family right away, and ever after that, when a boy was born, he had to be circumcised when he was 8 days old.

But what did God require of Abram? Simply do the ritual. That is all. God will do the rest. God renewed the promise about children in verse 5-6: "*No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.*" He renewed the promise about land in verse 8: "*The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.*"

But the heart of the covenant comes in verse 7: "*I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.*" The only real requirement is placed on God. God promised to give something to Abraham. What do you think it is that God gave to Abraham here? God gave himself. *I will be your God. I place myself at your service.*

God wanted to emphasize that he will be there for us; he is there to help us; he is my God and your God. And he has great plans for you. He wants to do great things for you. His greatest plan is not to recreate the world, but to recreate your heart - to make you good, to train you to live as a child of God. You should always be able to see the father in the child. And as he recreates us, we become his - his people. But first he gives himself to us; only later does he say, "And now, you are mine, now act like my people should".

Now the church no longer circumcises her sons. But does God still make promises to his people? Does he still come to them and says, "I am your God"? Yes, he does so at our baptism. Baptism is not first our promise to God but God's promise to us. Has God promised you that he will be your God? Has he given himself to you? Every believer should seek the sacrament of

baptism so that his life might be built on God's unshakeable promise.

Baptism has replaced circumcision. Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:10). God comes to believers who come to Christ as adults, and he says: Baptize them so that I can confirm my promise to them. As surely as they are baptized, so surely does God the Father promise to be your father, and God the Son to save you from your sins, and God the Holy Spirit to train you to be a child of God.

There are some promises that never are fulfilled. But God's promises always are. Trust his promises, and if you have not received the circumcision of Christ, then seek it so that you might live out of them.