

CHRIST: To Whom the Promises Were Made [Galatians 3.16]

Read Genesis 15.1 – 17.27 & Galatians 3.16

‘CHRIST IN GENESIS’: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS & SETTING THE CONTEXT

“The text of Genesis 15, taken as a unit, asks whether Abraham can, in fact, *trust*. And it asks if Yahweh can, in fact, *be trusted*. It is faith which permits Abraham to trust and God to be trusted. It is unsure faith that wonders about the delay. The issues are set here. The remainder of the Abrahamic narrative explores the answers.” ~Walter Brueggemann | [Genesis](#)

1/ This lesson will be a continuation of our last lesson [[Lesson 8: CHRIST: God’s Blessing to the Nations](#)] and will affirm the promises that Yahweh made to Abram in **ch 12.1-3**. So we will repeatedly refer back to those promises and draw from them.

2/ The reason I am titling this lesson with the CHRIST-marker of ‘To Whom the Promises Were Made’ is because Paul makes the bold proclamation in **Galatians 3.16** that every time Yahweh makes a covenant promise to be fulfilled in Abram’s ‘offspring’ [or ‘seed’ KJV], it is always in singular form, and not plural ‘offsprings’ or ‘seeds’: **“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is CHRIST.”**

3/ So we need to ‘nail this down’ in our understanding of all the covenant promises Yahweh will make to Abram – ***YAHWEH MADE THOSE PROMISES TO HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST!*** And they would all ultimately and prophetically be fulfilled in CHRIST and His Gospel of Grace! **See Romans 15.8-9.**

4/ Yes, the ‘offspring’ would number many as we shall see in **ch 15.5**, but even then, those numerous ‘offsprings’ must still all be born from one common father, the promised son Isaac. And Yahweh specifically promises in **ch 17.21**: ***“But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”***

5/ And, in that promise also, **Isaac is a type and pre-enactment of CHRIST!** Again, Paul gives us the inspired New Testament interpretation and commentary on Yahweh’s purpose in CHRIST in **Romans 9.6-9**. Yahweh chose Isaac as His elect son of Abraham to bear the covenant promise forward to CHRIST. **“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”⁸ 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.⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son” [quoting from Genesis 17.21 & 18.10-11].** So, Isaac was the elect ‘offspring’ of Abraham’s through whom the covenant promises would be fulfilled. Isaac would carry the lineage forward to bring CHRIST into the world. And Isaac was also a believer in the same covenant promises – *and he would pre-enact all of us who would believe in CHRIST who came from him.*

6/ Paul returns to these events we will outline in our present lesson to illustrate how Isaac, as the elect and believing ‘offspring’ of Abraham is the carrier of the covenant promises made to Abraham and then confirmed to him also. You will read this New Testament interpretation in **Galatians 3.29**: **“And if you are CHRIST’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise”** – and continued on through Isaac in **Galatians 4.21-31**. Paul contrasts Ishmael, the ‘son of the slave woman,’ Hagar [who was not the heir of the Abrahamic covenant] with Isaac, who was ‘born through promise’ [v 23] and even ‘born according to the Spirit’ [v 29]. And so, Paul’s concluding verdict is, that when we believe in Jesus CHRIST, we are born again into God’s covenant family IN CHRIST: **“Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise” [v 28] ... and “So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman” [v 31].** And since CHRIST is the Redeemer who was born from Abraham through Isaac, **“For freedom CHRIST has set us free” [ch 5.1]** after the likeness of Isaac’s inheritance of the covenant

promises. Isaac was the son of the free woman [not of the slave woman] and was born into the freedom of the blessing of the Covenant. We are born the children of CHRIST, our Redeemer/Liberator, into the freedom of the same Covenant.

7/ And so, it is with these CHRIST-markers clearly set in our minds, we will outline the broad movements of the covenant promises Yahweh made to Abram ... to be immediately fulfilled in Isaac ... and then to be ultimately fulfilled in Abraham's and Isaac's Messianic Son, Jesus CHRIST! And then to be graciously granted to us who believe in CHRIST!

I / Genesis 15.1-21 | Yahweh affirms His promise with a covenant

1/ vv 1-6 / Sometimes, even after we have received what we know to be a specific promise from God through His Word, it seems to take 'forever' for it to come to pass. Several years have come and gone since the promises Yahweh had made to Abram back in **ch 12.1-3**. And a lot of 'interruptive' events have taken place, all of which have the appearances of not just delaying the fulfillment of the promises, but even circumventing and breaking the promises to make them 'null and void': like a famine in Canaan, their temporary traumatic sojourn in Egypt, the family conflict and separation between Abram and Lot, and finally the invasion of Canaan by the foreign kings and the hostage-taking of Lot and the citizens of Sodom. Not only is life 'going on,' but it's leaving Abram singing, 'Where have all the promises gone...long time passing' and 'The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind,' as in 'blowing away.'

2/ So Yahweh appears to Abram again [**as in ch 12.1, 7 & 13.14**] to re-assure him that *He is still committed to fulfilling every word of everything He has promised*. But it will be in His time and in His way. Abram appears to have been questioning himself: did he 'cheat' himself by not taking the rewards of the spoils the king of Sodom had offered him [**ch 14.21-24**]? After all, the king of Sodom was offering to give him a significant portion of 'the land' in these assets. But Abram had once again cast himself upon without reservation on Yahweh's promise. Yahweh re-assures Abram: **"Fear not, Abram, I AM your shield; your reward shall be very great."** "But, Yahweh, you have also promised me an offspring, a child, and through that child to multiply me into a great nation and bless all the families of the earth shall be blessed as they come to know you. **"BUT, 'O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless ... Behold, you have given me no offspring..."**" Yahweh's answer is clear, simple, direct, emphatic, and unequivocal: **"This man [Abram's servant, Eliezer of Damascus] shall not be your heir; your very own son [literally, 'what shall come out of your own loins] shall be your heir!"** And then Yahweh goes further to give Abram a visual object lesson that will be there to remind him – think about how often Abram will recall this specific promise, every night of his life, wherever he may be – **"And He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"** This same visual and verbal promise will be recalled again in **ch 22.17**. Yahweh will do what He has promised to do...in His own time, and in this, His own way! He knows where He is going and what He is going to do! **Hebrews 11.12** reports that it was done exactly that way. And remember also, that this very promise was fulfilled in the innumerable children of faith who would 'born' to God through faith in Jesus CHRIST!

3/ v 6 / **"And he [Abram] believed The LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness."** This declaration of Abram's [and our] salvation from our sins and being justified [made right with God] BY GOD'S SOVERIGN, UNMERITED, GRACE THROUGH OUR PERSONAL FAITH IN HIM is the rule which will follow God's salvation plan all throughout the ages and generations of believers from beginning to end! Paul again gives us an extensive commentary on this statement and the *historical-redemptive progression* of God's covenant promises in **Romans 4.13-25 – fulfilled in CHRIST!** **"That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.' But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification"** [vv 22-25]. We don't need to believe that Abram had not trusted and believed in Yahweh's promise before, or that he had not been justified by his faith in Yahweh until this encounter and revelation. It is just a re-

affirmation that Abram had believed in Yahweh and had been justified by his faith apart from any works of his own from the very first call Yahweh had given him in **ch 12.1-4**: **“So Abram went, as The LORD had told him...”**

4/ vv 7-21 / But then, to add yet further affirmation to this promise Yahweh had made to Abram, Yahweh makes this solemn, irrevocable covenant to Abram [and CHRIST] by the covenant ceremony described here: Yahweh commands Abram to bring these sacrificial animals, slaughter them, divide them in half, and lay them off **‘each half over against the other’** with a walking path between them. This was the common custom of their day when a covenant was made between two parties. If a covenant was serious enough to require the sacrifice of an innocent life, ***it was serious enough to bind and require the covenant makers to keep it!*** And Yahweh will keep it!

5/ The covenant Yahweh makes and commits to keep will not be un-opposed by the ‘seed of the serpent’ – not then, and not over the coming years in their own experience, and not when it is finally, forever, and fully fulfilled by CHRIST. **“And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.”** And more, Yahweh prophesies that even in their own family/national experience, **“Then The LORD said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.’”** This was fulfilled to the detail and the numbers of years in the Egyptian captivity and the Exodus redemption [see Exodus 12.33-41].

6/ Yahweh Himself passed through the covenant sacrifices in **‘a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch’** to show His Presence in all His covenant promises and His commitment to keep it as He had said!

II / Genesis 16.1-16 | Abram attempts to substitute his own ‘offspring’

1/ vv 1-6 / This chapter will describe Abram’s fleshly attempt to fulfill Yahweh’s promise through his own means and by his own efforts. **“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children”** [see also **ch 11.30**]. If the Promised Seed/Offspring was to come *from his own loins* as Yahweh had promised, then if Yahweh is not giving Sarai conception, they must make it work through a ‘surrogate,’ Sarai’s Egyptian female servant, Hagar [was she included in Pharaoh’s dowry gifts in **ch 12.16?**]. At Sarai’s insistence, Abram impregnated Hagar, and she conceived. *At least Hagar’s son would be ‘from his own loins.’* Hagar then contemptuously taunted Sarai and ‘owned’ her over this preeminence she now enjoyed – carrying her husband’s child. Sarai resented Hagar’s very presence in the family, and Abram gave Sarai permission to deal harshly with Hagar and require her to leave ‘to parts unknown’ – she would have to fend for herself.

2/ vv 7-15 / But they would have to live with the consequences of their failure of faith and trusting Yahweh, and He had plans to show His gracious covenant faithfulness by contrasting the birth of this **‘offspring of the flesh’** with His own **‘son of the promise’** which He would give. So Yahweh appears even to this poor helpless mother-to-be and tells her to **“Return to your mistress and submit to her.”** Hagar does, **“And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six year old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.”** This is now thirteen years after Abram’s first obedience to Yahweh’s promise to go to Canaan and receive the covenant inheritance there [**ch 12.4**].

3/ This account in the *historical-redemptive progression* purposes of God is also the basis of Paul’s extensive allegory found in **Galatians 3.21-31**.

III / Genesis 17.1-14 | Yahweh confirms His covenant with a sign [circumcision]

1/ vv 1-8 / **“When Abram was ninety-nine years old The LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I AM God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.’”** The eleven years between the birth of Ishmael and now are passed over in silence. Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born [Ishmael is now 11 years old], and Abram is now 99 years old. Abram has had to learn to wait on the faithfulness of Yahweh to fulfill

His covenant promises – in His own way, by His own means, and in His own time. *Abraham was learning he must trust – and Yahweh was promising and demonstrating He can be trusted!*

2/ So Yahweh once again re-affirms and confirms His commitment to what He has promised He will do:

“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram [*exalted father*], but your name shall be Abraham [*father of a multitude*], for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

3/ vv 9-14 / It is at this time that Yahweh gives Abram the outward, physical sign of the circumcision of their males’ foreskins. This circumcision will mark and identify His covenant promises to His people of faith, and their commitment to obey Him by their faith in Him. Once again, as we are told in the concluding verses of this chapter [vv 22-27], Abraham obeyed Yahweh’s covenant promise command. From this time forth, the descendants of Abraham will be called ‘**the circumcision.**’ When CHRIST comes as the Redeemer of His covenant people of faith, our distinguishing mark of faith will not be the circumcision of our flesh, but of our hearts [Romans 4.9-11; Philippians 4.3; Colossians 2.11-15; et. al].

IV / Genesis 17.15-27 | Yahweh promises to provide His covenant ‘offspring’

1/ So now, it is Yahweh’s time to reveal more specificity to the covenant promise He has been making to Abraham from the beginning. *THIS* is how God will fulfill the promise to Abraham that **“I will make of you a great nation ... from the offspring who shall come from your own loins ... whom Sarah your wife will bear to you [even though she is barren, old, and well past the age of conceiving and bearing a son (see Romans 4.16-21 & Hebrews 4.11-12)] ... through whom ‘all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”**

2/ Here are the specific details of this anchor covenant promise:

And God said to Abraham, **“As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 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.” 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?” ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” ¹⁹ God said, **“No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac [meaning, ‘laughter’ or ‘he laughs’]. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”****

3/ Going back to our primary CHRIST-marker in Galatians 3.16, note how Yahweh re-affirms in v 19: **“I will establish my covenant with HIM as an everlasting covenant for HIS offspring after HIM.”** In this immediate historical context, the heir of these covenant promises is Isaac: **“But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year”** [v 20].

4/ BUT in the *historical-redemptive progression* of the fulfillment of the covenant promises...

GOD IS MAKING THESE COVENANT PROMISES TO CHRIST – AND THEY WILL ALL BE FULFILLED IN HIM!