

Genesis Chapter 16 and 17 – John Karmelich

1. The next two chapters fall under the title of “Working on God’s Timing”.
 - a) These two chapters continue the story of the life of Abraham. In fact, in Chapter 17, we get to the part where “Abram” actually gets renamed “Abraham” by God. I’ve been using the name “Abraham” for the last several lessons, even though the text only uses “Abram” as “Abraham” is the name we all think of today.
 - b) Chapter 16-17 can be summarized as follows: Abraham and Sarah are still without children although God promised Abraham children. They decide to speed up the process by getting a slave girl, Hagar, to bear children with Abraham. After Hagar gets pregnant, Abraham’s wife Sarah is now resentful of Hagar and treats her rough. Hagar runs away. God then speaks to Hagar. God tells Hagar to go back and that God is going to bless her son. In Chapter 17, which is 13 years later, God then tells Abraham that another son would come through Sarah herself and that child would be part of the direct line of the Messiah. Chapter 17 is full of promises, blessings and requirements for Abraham.
 - c) Remember that the emphasis on these studies is on the “why” question?
 - i) Why didn’t God just bless Abraham and Sarah with a son earlier in the text and this whole mess with Hagar would not be necessary?”
 - ii) Why is the part about Hagar even mentioned in the first place? Chapter 16 could have been summarized in a few verses by saying “After many years, Abraham and Sarah were still barren. Abraham had a child with someone else, but that didn’t count. ☺
 - iii) This is the first recorded conversation in the bible between God and a woman other than Eve. Why did Hagar have that privilege? Why not Sarah? After all, Sarah was the one suffering without children. Why not Noah’s wife or any of the other people we have read about so far? Another question to ponder about this section is, “If getting Hagar pregnant was a mistake by Abraham, why does Hagar get blessed by God for this mistake?”
 - d) The answer to most of these questions leads back to God’s key promise to Abraham. It is: “I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you” (Genesis 12:3).
 - i) Remember the promise of Genesis 12:3 is unconditional.
 - ii) Despite the fact she went along with Abraham and Sarah’s plan, and despite the fact she ran away from them while pregnant, Hagar was still “one of God’s people”. She trusted in the God of Abraham. Thus God “tracked her down” after she ran away and gave blessings and great promises to Hagar’s son. That son is part of the blessing of Abraham.
 - a) In the New Testament, it states that those who believe in Jesus are “Sons of Abraham” we are adopted into God’s family. (See Galatians 3:7)
 - b) In that sense, the promise of Genesis 12:3 is unconditional to us as well. We may mess up like the events of this chapter, but as long as we are trusting in the “God of Abraham”, we will be blessed as Abraham.
 - c) If you are part of this family, even when we make mistakes, and sometimes especially when we make mistakes, God comes after us the same way He went to go track down Hagar. She is “one of His”.
 - d) Jesus said, ““What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?” (Matthew 18:12 NIV)

- e) Which leads us back to these two chapters In Genesis. This is the story of Abraham and Sarah getting impatient on God’s promises. They take matters into their own hands. Despite that, God still blesses them with their own child in Chapter 17 because the promises to them are unconditional. Further, God knew they were going to make this mistake and uses it to teach us lessons about the “wandering sheep” through Hagar.
2. One can read this section of the bible thinking about the concept of “sin, curses and blessings”. We’re going to read later in this lesson how Paul compares Hagar and her son to “the flesh” and Sarah and her son to “the spirit”.
- a) This is because the birth of Hagar’s son was Abraham and Sarah “taking matters into their hands” and not working on God’s timing. Therefore, Paul uses the word picture “the flesh” in that it was done by human desires and not God desires for our life.
- b) We will read of Hagar’s son, Ishmael being “blessed” by God.
- i) One thing I pondered is, “If this kid (Ishmael) is a mistake, why did God bless Hagar by 1) personally naming Ishmael before he was born and saying 2) Ishmael would be a great leader of many people and lead a great nation? (Genesis 17:20)
- ii) The best answer I could come up with is “God forgives our sins, but we still have to live with the consequences of that sin”. The children of Hagar were “thorns in the side of the Israelites” for thousands of years, even until today. Besides the historical aspect, there is the idea that “Yes, I God will forgive you of the sin of taking matters into your hands. You Abraham and your descendants have to live with the consequences of that sin and the children of Hagar will “remind” the Israelites of the consequences of taking matters into your own hands.”
3. Chapters 16-17 in the context of all of Genesis, is about Abraham’s faith grow in God.
- a) When God calls us to follow him, He does not expect perfection on day one.
- b) God does desire that we grow in our faith and trust in Him.
- c) What we read in Genesis is selected “life lessons” in the life of Abraham. Each is designed to teach us things about how to grow in our own faith with God.
- d) Chapter 16 is all about living our life on God’s timing. One of the great dangers as a believer is “taking matters into our own hands”. It is to say, “Yes I believe in God, but God, you’re not working fast enough in this area of my life, so I’m going to take over.” God often moves aside for the moment, let’s us mess up, and then after we ask God to come back into that part of our life, God helps clean up the mess!”
- e) Chapter 17 is about God blessing Abraham despite the failure of Chapter 16. It is the reminder of God’s unconditional love for us. God not only wants to bless Abraham’s life, but wants to bless ours as well. A God that is perfect is a God that is perfect in love.
- f) These lessons to Abraham are designed to teach us about trusting God and specifically trusting in God’s timing for our life. Further, it is about trusting God completely, as opposed to only trusting God in certain areas of our life.
- g) This leads to the problem of how do we trust in God’s timing?
- i) For example, if a great job opportunity comes, is that “God’s will” for our life?
- ii) Unfortunately, we don’t get angels or audible messages from God to make our decisions. Instead God says to us, “I gave you brain, and more importantly, I gave you a set of instructions in the bible, now follow them”. Jesus taught us to pray “your will be done”. If that job opportunity means more money, and it does not have any major negative consequences (e.g., an immoral job or moving your family to a location that would do more harm to their growth), then take it.
- iii) In those times when I am not sure, I pray, “Lord, bless it or block it”. If God doesn’t want me to move forward, He will find a way to stop it. In the meantime, pray for guidance, and read your bible for guidance, and live your life accordingly.

- iv) God once told Adam, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24, NIV). That command applies to Abraham as well. “God’s will” for Abraham was to be obedient to God and wait on his timing. God wanted Abraham to have a child through Sarah, as opposed to “taking matters into his own hands” and taking Hagar as a surrogate wife.
 - h) OK, over three pages so far, and I haven’t touched a verse yet. ☺ Time to get rolling!
4. Chapter 16, Verse 1: Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar;² so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.
- a) Just as a reminder, Sarai will be renamed Sarah in Chapter 17. Since we all know her as Sarah, I'm going to call her “Sarah” just to keep it simple.
 - b) Notice how “religious” Sarah sounds as she is rationalizing a reason to disobey God.
 - i) Notice when Sarah made up this plan to have Abraham use Hagar as a second wife or a surrogate, she invokes God’s name as if somehow, “It’s his fault we don’t have children yet.” The point is to understand how clever the human mind can work to rationalize what God does not want us to do.
 - ii) Archeologists will tell you that it was “culturally acceptable” for Abraham and Sarah to have a surrogate for them. If a woman could not produce children, it was acceptable for a man to take a second wife or a surrogate to have children.
 - a) Just because something is culturally acceptable does not mean it is biblically acceptable. It would be like arguing today, “What’s the big deal? Everybody is doing it”.
 - b) God calls us to live by a different set of standards than the “world” lives by. That is the case of these verses. Abraham made the mistake of getting his mind off of the promises of God and onto the present problem and rationalized his own solution.
 - c) The ideal relationship in God’s plan for us between one man and one woman.
 - i) "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," (about divorce) Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Mark 10:5-9, NIV)
 - ii) Divorce is not condemned as an unforgivable sin. It is discouraged, but there are no verses in the bible that say if you are divorced, you are going to hell.
 - iii) A similar idea applies to polygamy. You can’t find one story in the bible where “anything good happens” in a polygamous relationship.
 - a) “He (A Jewish man) must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.” Deuteronomy 17:17a, NIV
5. Verse 3: So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.
- a) The only previous mention of the word “Egypt” was when Abraham went down to Egypt back in Chapter 10. The fact that Hagar is called an “Egyptian maidservant” implies that Hagar became Sarah’s maidservant during that time era.
 - b) This verse also implies there was a 10-year time period since the Egypt trip that Abraham and Sarah were now back in “Israel”, i.e., “land of Canaan”.
 - c) Before we move on, you can almost sense the jealousy that was going to happen.

- i) Let's assume that Abraham and Sarah have been trying to get pregnant for about 10 years. Maybe Sarah felt sorry for the man she loved. She knew that God promised children to Abraham, and so far, no luck.
 - ii) What this little section shows is that we could have good intentions, but still not be following God's will at that moment in our life.
 - iii) Now here is Hagar, having sexual relations with Abraham and gets pregnant on the first try. You can see how resentment can build between the two women.
 - iv) In hindsight, you can see how this is a "no-win situation" for Abraham. If he gets Hagar pregnant, he will have to deal with the resentment of Sarah. If he fails, then there is still stress in their relationship due to a lack of children.
- 6. Verse 4 (cont.): When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."
 - a) The main thing we read of here is Hagar despising Sarai, not the other way around.
 - b) In this culture, a woman having children is essential. You can almost sense the growth in Hagar's ego at this point. "Being a slave girl, I was nothing. I can only have a family if my master wills it to be. Now I am "promoted" to being my master's wife. My master and his wife have been trying for years to have children. Now I do it on my first try. God must think I'm special. God loves me more than Sarah as he blessed me with children."
 - c) Before you think that Sarah is any better than Hagar at this moment, let's read further.
- 7. Verse 6: "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.
 - a) Being the typical male husband and not wanting to get involved, Abraham tells Sarah, "Honey, you do whatever you think is right. I'll be on the couch watching the game if you have any more questions. ☺"
 - i) I personally see fault in Abraham at this point for not taking the lead and intervening. Even if Abraham understood this is wrong (which he didn't at this point), it is no excuse to mistreat a pregnant woman.
 - b) Here was Sarah mistreating a pregnant woman. Whatever Sarah did, it was bad enough that made Hagar want to run away for her life.
- 8. Verse 7: The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.
 - a) "The road to Shur" is the pathway from the land of "Israel" back to Egypt. Hagar, abandoning the father of her child, was probably running back to her family.
 - b) Before we talk about the angel and Hagar, we need to talk a little about the expression "The Angel of the Lord". Whoever this angel is, it is a unique expression.
 - i) Many commentators believe that "The Angel of the Lord" is a unique Old Testament title of Jesus Christ. Some see him as Jesus-himself prior to his incarnate state.
 - a) This angel speaks in "first person" in Verse 9 and many see this as God-himself speaking "in the flesh". Others simply say this is a messenger speaking on God's behalf.
 - b) You never read of this Angel of the Lord speaking after Jesus is born. You do read of this Angel of the Lord appearing to Joseph after Mary was pregnant. In summary, just remember that whoever this "angel" is, it is something special. It may, or it may not be a preincarnate appearance of Jesus, depending upon which scholar you ask. ☺

- c) Notice the title that this angel addresses Hagar. He calls her “Servant of Sarai”.
 - i) This is Hagar who was abused by Sarah (Sarai).
 - ii) This is Hagar who is running for her life from Sarah.
 - iii) Notice he doesn’t say, “Oh Hagar, one who is pregnant by Abraham”, or even possibly, one who trusts in the God of Abraham.”
 - iv) The reason the angel uses that term is that the angel wants Hagar to “think about” that term. Let me paraphrase and expand, “Oh Hagar, remember the promises that God gave to Abraham? You must have heard those promises while Sarah and Abraham were working out this arrangement for you. Here you are pregnant with this child who God said wonderful things would happen. Now here you are running away from your mistress.”
 - v) Let’s go to the next set of verses and then tie it all together:
- 9. Verse 9: Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her."
 - ¹⁰ The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."
 - ¹¹ The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery."
 - a) What is implied, but not stated in the text, is that Hagar agreed to go back. Stop and think about the faith that took. As a pregnant woman, would you be willing to go back to a person who mistreated you?
 - i) Some speculate that Hagar then told Sarah this story and Sarah “lightened up” on Hagar after Sarah heard God spoke to her.
 - b) The great lesson here is “Where God leads, God provides”. If God made a promise that a son would come and be a great leader, how much “harm” can Sarah do to her if God is watching out for her?
 - i) This child Hagar is the first person in the bible personally named by God prior to his birth. The name Hagar means “hearing” in that the Lord has heard your misery. Despite the fact that Hagar was not part of God’s will for Abraham and Sarah, God was fully aware this was going to happen. God used the birth of Hagar to teach all of us about the consequences of not obeying God’s will.
 - ii) The reason that most of a chapter is dedicated to this “Gentile slave girl” is that a wonderful word-picture is being created for us. It is that “God will protect those who trust in the “God of Abraham”, even though they are not direct descendants of Abraham.
- 10. Verse 12: He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." ¹³ She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." ¹⁴ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.
 - a) You kind of wish the text would say, “And Hagar had some nice kids, you got along peacefully with Isaac” kids and they all lived happily ever after. ☺ The Middle East would be have had a much more peaceful history if that were true.
 - b) So why have these verses? Why did God tell Hagar that her descendants would live in hostility toward “his brothers”, meaning other children of Abraham? Why not just tell Hagar that she would have a “great son” and tell her to go back to Abraham and Sarah?
 - i) Again, the word-picture being shown for us is about the consequences of not obeying God’s will. Hagar’s son Ishmael would be the leader of a great nation (more on this in Chapter 17). Calling Hagar’s son Ishmael “a wild donkey of a man” is a word-picture to the fact that descendants would essentially be “stubborn pain-in-the butt’s to the children of Israel. Jews and Arabs having been fighting for thousands of years. It all started in these verses.

- ii) Verse 13 has Hagar naming the water-well here “Beer Lahai Roi”. It was designed to remember the location where she was “saved”, despite the fact that she ran away from Sarah. Give Hagar some credit here. She was “saved” in that she trusted in the Angel of the Lord and agreed to submit herself to Sarah again.
 - c) I want you to remember that the opening verse of the New Testament calls Jesus “A son of Abraham”. If the New Testament never had the sections about the Gentiles (non-Jews) being saved in the Book of Acts, one could think you have to be of Jewish heritage in order to have eternal life.
 - i) The New Testament teaches that we are adopted into to be “Sons of Abraham” by our faith in Jesus. Here in Genesis, we have a “non-Jewish slave of Abraham” being “saved” because she is part of the family of Abraham. In a strange way, a purpose of this chapter is a prediction of the future salvation of non-Jewish believers. Yes there are lots of lessons on other things, but the fact that all of these verses teach about the salvation and promise to a “Gentile woman” shows how God cares for all people and not just those of Jewish descent.
11. Verse 16: Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael. Chapter 17, Verse 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."
- a) Remember the chapter breaks were not added to the 16th Century AD. I like to read Verse 16 of Chapter in context along with Verse 1 of Chapter 17.
 - b) The key phrase of Verse 16 is Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born. Abraham was 99 when God spoke to him in Verse 1. I want to notice the 13-year time gap.
 - c) OK, so why this time gap? Why did God wait until Hagar was 13 before God made this announcement of a new child through Sarah?
 - i) Chapter 17 mentions twice that Abraham was 99 years old when this happened.
 - a) I believe God waited until Abraham and Sarah were beyond the years of bearing children just to add a “special miracle aspect” to Isaac being born.
 - b) “Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26, NIV)
 - d) This is as good a time as any to see what Paul said about this in Galatians:
 - i) “For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman (Hagar) and the other by the free woman (Sarah). His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. (Galatians 4:22)
 - ii) Let me paraphrase Paul: “Yes the story of Hagar and her son is literally true. This narrative in Genesis also gives us a word-picture of living under the bondage of “taking matters into our own hands” as opposed to waiting on God’s timing.
 - iii) Paul, in Galatians, was comparing trying to be right with God by obeying the God’s commandments through our own self-discipline as opposed to letting God work through our life on his timing. The best analogy I have heard for this is “Trying to push a bus uphill and then realizing the bus has a motor and all I have to do is ride on the bus” (Source unknown).
 - iv) The mistake Christians make is trying to obey God not by doing what he asks us to do, but take matters into our hands and “work ahead of God’s schedule”
 - v) I will be the first to admit this is difficult. We desperately want to be in control of our own lives. We want to work on our own timing. Sometimes it is a “moment by moment” thing where we have to tell God, “Lord, I want to do something this way. You are in charge, not me. If it is not your will, give me the patience to wait on your timing. If this is not your will for me right now, help me to accept the

present situation.” Also remember that God can’t lead you if you are not moving. God is not going to drag you to the next step in your life. Sometimes we can only know God’s will if we move forward and things “are not working out”. That is when we have to surrender our will and see where God is leading us. Further, this is why we pray “your will be done” on a regular basis. It is a prayer for God to intercede in our life and be in charge of our decisions.

- e) Which leads us back to Genesis. We have this 13-year gap, where now, God is telling Abraham again how He is going to bless Abraham with children through Sarah. This also leads back to the question of “why 13 years?”
 - i) Some suggest that the number “13” in the bible is associated with evil. In Exodus, when God struck dead the firstborn of all the Egyptians, it was the 13th day on their calendar. The term “Friday the 13th” comes from that event because it was probably a Friday night by the Egyptian calendar. (A Jewish day began at sundown. Therefore, the Sabbath (Saturday) was “Friday evening” by the Egyptian calendar.
 - ii) My personal view is something different. For Roman Catholics, the age of 13 is when boys and girls are “confirmed” as Catholics. For religious Jews, the age of 13 is when boys have their “Bar Mitzvah” to confirm their Jewish faith.
 - a) It appears that around the age of 13 is most children can rationally make a their own free-will decision for God. Thus, this age is picked by Christians and Jews to confirm that decision.
 - b) The word-picture is that at (or by) age 13, we have the mental ability to decide whether or not to follow God. Although it is difficult to prove, I suspect it was when the boy was 13 years old that God wanted to show this “word-picture” of “casting out the flesh” of Hagar-Ishmael” to show the other word-picture of the spiritual promise of the blessing through Isaac.
 - f) Let’s get back to Verse 1 of Chapter 17: God said to Abraham “walk before me and be blameless”. How does God expect Abraham to be perfect and “blameless”?
 - i) Let me give you a clue: Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48, NIV)
 - ii) This is not about never making another mistake in your life. This is about the Gospel message. This is about being perfect in that God is providing a perfect sacrifice on Abraham’s behalf. The Cross is “future-tense” to Abraham and past-tense to us. The promise of the Messiah comes through Isaac. Trusting in that promise is why God is commanding Abraham here to “be perfect”.
 - iii) This is also about fully committing your life to God. We sin, as there are areas of our life we still want to control as opposed to letting God control them.
12. Verse 3: Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 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. 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."
- a) God gives five “I will” statements in this paragraph:
 - i) “I will make you very fruitful” (i.e., lots of children).
 - ii) “I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.”
 - a) From his descendants were the Kings of Israel, and also kings from Abraham’s other descendants to various “Arab” nations.

- iii) "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you"
 - a) The "everlasting covenant" is a reference to the coming Messiah.
 - b) The emphasis is on "everlasting" as Jesus will rule over our lives forever.
- iv) "I will give (the land of Israel) as an everlasting possession.
 - a) The land belongs to the Jewish people, period. This promise is not conditional upon the Jew's obedience, it is only conditional upon God keeping that promise! Again, it is forever.
- v) "I will be their God".
 - a) This is the tough one! ☺ Every time the Jewish people were disobedient and turned to things other than God, they got into trouble. The "hard part" about being a Christian is that once you have turned your life over to Jesus, God then focuses more upon us and we get punished, or at least feel miserable when we are not doing God's will for our life at that moment.
- b) We should talk a little about the concept of God's grace.
 - i) Grace is getting something wonderful you don't deserve. Abraham didn't ask God for all of these blessings. Abraham didn't do anything to earn all of these blessings, God picked Abraham because God wanted to pick Abraham, period.
 - ii) Abraham was considered right-in-God's-eyes, i.e., "righteous" because Abraham believed in God's promises. (Abraham 15:6)
 - iii) Remember that there are long time gaps between each of these stories in Genesis.
 - a) Think about how much of your life has gone by in the past 13 years. Now realize it was 13 years from the time of Hagar being born to the time of this promise. Despite that "mistake" God is still going to bless Abraham. God patiently waits on His timing. In the meantime, God is testing us and wanting to mature us by having us trust in him more and more.
- c) This is the actual part of the text where Abram is renamed Abraham.
 - i) To oversimplify the Hebrew text, his name is changed from "singular to plural".
 - ii) Abram's had no children. By changing Abram's name to Abraham, God is making a prediction of the pluralistic nature of how many children Abraham will have.

13. Verse 9: Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between you and me. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner--those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

- a) Before I start cutting away at circumcision ☺, let's discuss these verses in the context of the entire chapter.
 - i) You can divide all of Chapter 17 into paragraphs that open with "God said".
 - a) They are located in Verses 1, Verse 3, Verse 9, Verse 15, and Verse 19.
 - b) Each "God said" has a different emphasis.
 - c) In the same way, the creation story is broken up into different "God said" sentences and paragraphs, so all of these blessings and requirements of Chapter 17 are broken up with "God said" statements.
 - ii) The first "God said" paragraph (Verses 1-2) emphasizes who God is.
 - iii) The second "God said" paragraph (Verses 3-8) emphasizes God's blessings on Abraham, for his descendants and for those who trust in the God of Abraham.

- iv) This remaining “God said” text focus on what God expects as a response to the promises and blessings of the first paragraph.
 - v) You will see that pattern all through the bible. This is the pattern of 1) I am God, then 2) Here is what I will do for you and 3) Here is what I expect of you.
 - vi) In Christianity, the key is to live our lives out of gratitude for what God did for us. We don’t live the requirements because “we have to”; we live the requirements because we want to. It is our way of responding to the fact that God is God and He has blessed us and wants to bless us more and more.
- b) OK, time for a discussion of circumcision.
- i) The first thing God required of Abraham was not to obey the 10 commandments, not go start working on producing Isaac, but to cut away the foreskin of his penis along with everyone of his household. (Imagine being a slave in Abraham’s household and hearing that announcement! ☺)
 - ii) Circumcision is designed to be a sign of your commitment between you and God. It is a word picture of “cutting off the flesh”. Every time Abraham would make love to Sarah or even go to the bathroom he would be visually reminded of that promise he made to God.
 - iii) The obvious comparison to the Christian life is that of baptism. Getting baptized does not mean you are eternally saved. Baptism is a visual sign that you are willing to commit your life to serve God.
 - a) The mistake many people make today is that they trust in their baptism for their salvation as opposed to their relationship with God.
 - b) God never intended the event of baptism or circumcision to be end unto itself. That was the mistake many Christian-Jews made when Paul was a missionary. They saw circumcision as a requirement for salvation as opposed to a sign of one’s commitment.
 - c) I believe all Christians should be baptized. I don’t believe it is a requirement. If one is on their deathbed and truly accepts Jesus, I don’t believe that person is going to hell because he or she couldn’t be dunked in water prior to their death.
- c) Onto the big theological question: Should Christians be circumcised?
- i) Most of the Paul’s letter to the Galatians is on that topic. (Galatians 6:15)
 - ii) Here is one of Paul’s closing thoughts on that topic: “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.” (NIV)
 - iii) Let me see if I can summarize a lot of Christian theology in a few sentences:
 - a) God did start the covenant of circumcision with Abraham. Centuries later, Jeremiah predicted about a day when a new covenant relationship will happen with the nation of Israel. (Jeremiah 31:31) This means that the “Old Covenant”, which is symbolized through circumcision is no longer necessary.
 - b) Notice the text in Genesis says that this requirement of circumcision is not forever. The text says, “for the generations to come”. It is to go on for a long time, but the text implies it is not go on forever.
 - c) The old covenant is about being “made right in God’s eyes” by trying to do what is right by keeping the law. Through the centuries, the Israelites showed the impossibility of this law. (See Acts 15:10).
 - d) The purpose of the 10 commandments and all of the Old Testament laws is to show us God’s requirements. It is impossible to live those through self-discipline. The new covenant is the concept that we are saved as Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Therefore we as believers are not under the requirements of “the law” and circumcision is not required.

- e) As believers, we can then live as God required of us by the power of the Holy Spirit working through us. It is not a matter of self-discipline, but a matter of fully committing our life to God and letting God “take over”.
 - iv) With all that said, I do believe in circumcision for health reasons. Medical studies have shown the benefits of circumcision. Jewish women have a very low rate of cervical cancer and this appears to be tied to circumcision. (None of These Diseases, by Morris McMillen)
 - d) A couple of more tidbits on circumcision and we can move on:
 - i) For children, the emphasis is on the eighth day. Remember God rested on the 7th day. The number “eight” in the bible is associated with “new beginning”. If God rests on the 7th day, then the 8th day represents “something new”.
 - a) Those that study the numerical values of the name Jesus and his various titles (e.g., Son of Man, etc.) notice a pattern where all of Jesus titles are divisible by eight. It is almost as if the number 8 is tied to Jesus. Again, the emphasis is on a new beginning.
 - ii) God required that everyone associated with Abraham is to be circumcised.
 - a) This includes Hagar, and the servants of his house. It is a word-picture that God wants us to be a witness to others.
 - b) For example, God is saying in effect, “If you want them to be part of your household, then you Abraham should lead them and be an example. You want them to be obedient to your God. You want those around you to follow the same God.
 - c) The same way God wants us to lead our children into following Him, is shown here as a word-picture in that all of Abraham’s household must be circumcised.
14. Verse 15: God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."
- a) Here is the part where Sarai is renamed Sarah.
 - i) Like the renaming of Abraham, there is a “pluralistic” aspect to her new name.
 - ii) The name Sarai means “my princesses”. Sarah implies the fact that she will be a princess (i.e., mother to) many people.
 - b) The emphasis here is that God is going to work through Abraham and Sarah as opposed to Abraham and Hagar. If you read Verse 18, you will comprehend that Abraham still didn’t fully “get it”.
15. Verse 17: Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"
- a) Abraham laughing is not one of doubt, but of joy. Laughter can be a natural human reaction when we have difficulty comprehending a situation. When we are overwhelmed by a thought being true, especially a happy thought, it causes us to laugh.
 - b) As to Verse 18, here is a case where I don’t like the NIV translation: The New King James says, “And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” (NKJV).
 - i) I believe that Abraham didn’t fully believe God’s promises. The text mentions the fact that Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90. Abraham didn’t believe she could have children and ask that the blessing come through Ishmael. Abraham wanted Ishmael to have the promised blessing as the son, or at least be part of the “umbrella” of blessing.

16. Verse 19: Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year." ²² When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.
- a) Here we have another "God said" paragraph. This paragraph focuses on the different blessings and promises given to Isaac versus Ishmael.
 - b) Let me paraphrase what God is saying: "Yes, I know you love your other son Ishmael and I have great plans for him, as he also believes in Me. However, your job Abraham is to focus upon My plans for your life. At this moment, I'm focusing on your son Isaac. The Messiah will come through Isaac and not through Ishmael.
 - i) This paragraph mentions the "everlasting covenant". That is a term referring to the fact that his descendant would be the Messiah.
 - c) Try to imagine this from Abraham's point of view. You are 99 and your wife 90. You have never had any children despite years of trying. God not only tells you that the two of you will have children, but God changes your name to a plural-noun to emphasize the plurality of the children you are going to have!
 - i) I suspect that Abraham was walking around happy at this point. Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel made up a cute story about Abraham:
 - a) "Hey old timer, what are you so happy about?"
 - b) Abraham responds, "I'm going to have a son."
 - c) "How old are you?" "99"; "How old is your wife?" "90";
 - d) "Really, is your wife pregnant?"
 - e) "Nope, but God said I'm going to have a son, and I believe him"
 - f) Chuck Smith then goes on to tell of the joy we should have knowing we are going to live for eternity and the great blessings that God has for us.
 - d) Let's talk about the promises to Ishmael for a moment.
 - i) It does mention that that Ishmael will be the father of "12 princes". It is interesting that Isaac's son Jacob then had 12 sons, each of which was the leader of the 12 tribes of Israel. I'm not sure what is the connection, but I don't believe the bible has coincidences. ☺ I think the main point is God stated, "I will bless those that bless you". Ishmael is still a Son of Abraham and God blessed him as well.
 - ii) The list of these twelve "princes" is given in Genesis 25:13-15.
17. Verse 23: On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, ²⁵ and his son Ishmael was thirteen; ²⁶ Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. ²⁷ And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.
- a) My favorite moment in this section is Verse 23: On that same day.
 - i) I think there are few things God enjoys more than obedience and the same day that God finished his sermon to Abraham, he got the knife out. ☺
 - b) Notice the ages of Abraham and his son are repeated in this section.
 - i) It mentions that Abraham was 99 and Ishmael was 13 when he was circumcised.
 - ii) Besides any possible symbolic meaning of their age, I think the important thing is the fact they were "born again" from this point.
 - iii) Circumcision, like baptism for Christians is a sign of a public witness that your desire is to live in obedience to God. From that day forward, your life is now lived for God and not for yourself. The "99" and "13" are listed to remember the day that their life started afresh.

- c) I wondered how every other male in Abraham’s household felt about this. “Hey Abram, I agreed to be your servant and all, and you treat me nicely, but do we really have to do that thing with the knife? ☺
 - i) Remember that Abraham had a large household staff. He had 318 trained servants under him who fought for Abraham in the battle of 4 kings versus 5 kings (Genesis 14:14). Let’s face it, Abraham had a lot of cutting to do! ☺
 - ii) This alone shows that Abraham was a good witness to those around him. Those servants not only trusted in Abraham, but the God of Abraham, and they were willing to make this physical commitment for the sake of Abraham’s God.
18. Let’s wrap this up. We went from Abraham jumping ahead of God’s timing and getting a slave girl pregnant to God blessing Abraham 13 years later despite Abraham’s “sin”.
- a) These chapters show God’s redemptive plan of the Messiah through Abraham and Isaac.
 - b) Also, these chapters are full of word-pictures of how to and how not to “walk by faith” in trusting God. While the line of the Messiah is important stuff, ☺ to those who already believes in Jesus, the important lessons are those about trusting in God and growing in your faith. Abraham learned about God’s timing. He also learned that despite his mistakes God still wanted to bless him and still did.
 - c) I think one of the biggest fears Christians have is “I’m not doing enough” or “I really messed up yesterday, boy is God mad at me now”. God’s love for you doesn’t change on a day-by-day basis. If anything, God wants you to confess that sin and walk with reassurance that sin is pardoned. What we have to live with is the long-term consequences of that sin. Sometimes God takes it away, but sometimes God leaves us lots of “little Ishmael’s” ☺ to remind us to do the right thing the next time.
19. Let’s pray: Father, we thank you for these lessons you have taught us through Abraham. Help us to be patient and wait on your timing for our life. May your will be done in our life, especially during the moments when we want to be in control ourselves. Give us the wisdom, discernment and knowledge to do your will and what you have specifically called us to do. Help us to remember that we are your ambassador’s to a lost and dying world. Just as Abraham had no permanent home in the Land of Canaan, help us to remember that this world is also not our home, and we too, live for the promise of a future day. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.