

GOD'S GENERAL MERCY; GOD'S SPECIFIC PLAN

Genesis 17:15-27

INTRODUCTION

There was a Rabbinical Prayer at the time of Jesus ...

→“Thank you Lord that I am not a Gentile or a woman.”

Now, we all know this is wrong. But why?

What is our justification for saying this is wrong?

The evolutionist has no logical basis to say this statement is wrong.

The atheist has no logical justification to say this is wrong.

Consensus, pragmatism, government (as long as it agrees with “me”) no basis, no standard, no defense to say that the holocaust was wrong ... he has no standard, no universal invariant metric by which to judge things other than his own fancies and his own whims. And the whims of man blow and change as the wind

They would not pray this prayer if they had understood Genesis 17.

READ Gen 17:15-27

Proposition:

A. Covenant Blessings - vv.15-22 - general; particular

B. Covenant Obedience

- vv. 23-27 - without compromise; without hesitation

Covenant Blessings:

From general to particular:

I. Sarai

II. Ishmael

III. Isaac

They are beneficiaries of God's Covenant promises but the covenant is not made with them.

1st General Blessing...

I. As for Sarai

Gen 17:15-18

Point – this woman, will be the mother of nations and kings

Proof – **Gen 17:15-18**

“Then God said to Abraham”

Recall five **speeches** of God

“As for Sarai your wife” – A. God’s 1st speech (1-2); B. God’s 2nd speech: As for Me (4-8); C. God’s 3rd speech: As for you (9-14);

D. God’s 4th speech: **As for Sarai** (15-19)

E. God’s 5th speech: As for Ishmael (20-21)

this is the **role** I have, you, ... now **Sarai** and **Ishmael**

Neither **Sarai** nor **Ishmael** are co-participants in the covenant,
Both are blessed by virtue of their relationship to Abraham.

He begins **“Sarai, your wife”**

- Abraham knows who his wife is
- This is a reminder that Hagar is not your wife

4 blessings for Sarah

- same four blessings as for Abraham

1. Identity

2. Posterity

3. Ethnicity

4. Royalty

1st Blessing ... **Identity**

1. New Name: Sarah (17:15)

“you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name.”

Unlike Abraham’s new name, no explanation is given.

The meaning comes from what follows, mother of nations, kings

Sarah = “princess” because she will be the mother of kings

May I remind you, we also have a name change. We were rebels, sinners, transgressors, enemies of God, children of the devil. Now we are called saints, friends of Christ and God, adopted children of God, co-heirs with Christ.

2nd Blessing ... **Posterity**
2. Child

God speaking to Abraham:

“¹⁶**And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her.**”

God had previously told Abraham he would have seed numbering as the stars of the heaven and dust of the earth. This is implicitly understood under the umbrella of God-intended monogamy.

➔ This is the first time God explicitly says the chosen son, the Son of Promise, will come from Sarah.

3rd Blessing ... **Ethnicity**
3. Mother of Nations

“**Then I will bless her, and she shall be a *mother of nations***”

Fulfilled in Gen 25:23 – “Two nations are in your womb”

• Jacob and Esau, Israel and Edom

4th Blessing ... **Royalty**
4. Mother of Kings of Peoples

“**kings of peoples shall come from her.**”

comes from v. 6 – same blessing of a royal line of descendants

- government, even with its imperfections, and order are a blessing from God
- what will come from Sarah will not be a headless monstrosity, but a well-ordered society

Illustration – Like circumcision ➔ she does not directly participate, but she is covered by the sign, she is a co-beneficiary.

Then, Abraham questions (17:17-18)

- this is the first and only time that Abraham speaks in these five discourses.
- only words of Abraham in chapter 17
- all the discourses are one way except this one.

“¹⁷**Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’**”

Worship (fell on his face) and incredulity (laughed) are mixed here

- his laughter is a mixture of joy and doubt
- not scorn
- not mocking
- incredulity → Turn to **Rom 4:18ff** - God’s divine commentary through the apostle Paul
 - Abraham did not waver in unbelief
 - he grew strong in faith and gave glory to God

Abraham laughs in 17:17. Sarah laughs in 18:12

- Sarah’s laughter brings a rebuke from God.
- Abraham’s does not.

“¹⁸**And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!’**”

Abraham’s response to God here is two-fold:

- suggests Ishmael as the inheritor of the Promise → **NO**
- This is Abraham’s second suggestion of alternate seed rejected by God (Eliezer 15:2-3)
- Prayer that Ishmael, his son, would not be forgotten before God → **YES**

Illustration– Sometimes we need bridges with holes in the middle, we need walls to high to scale, we see water too deep to tread - we

need those things in our lives at times. We are reminded of God's might, His power, His goodness, His purpose and His sovereignty.

Application – With El Shaddai, there is no hole in the bridge, there is no wall too high to scale, no water too deep ... with El Shaddai, there is no barrenness.

2nd General Blessing...

II. As for **Ishmael**

Gen 17:20

Leo asked (as a joke) – “Are you going to read from the Koran today?” ☺

Islam – Abraham is recognized as a prophet and apostle of Allāh and patriarch of many peoples.

Muslims believe that the prophet Abraham became the leader of the righteous in his time and it was through him that the people of both Arabia and Israel came. He spiritually purified both places as well as physically sanctifying the houses of worship. Abraham and Ismail (Ishmael) further established the rites of pilgrimage, or Hajj, which are still followed by Muslims today.

Muslims believe that Muhammad is a descendant of Abraham through Ishmael.

We are going to focus on the biblical Ishmael.
Not the distorted Ishmael high jacked by Islam.

Point – Ishmael, the Gentile will be blessed

How is Ishmael blessed by God's Covenant promises to Abraham?

Proof – **Gen 17:20** – “**And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.**”

“**And as for Ishmael**” → God's 5th speech

“**I have heard you**” – God brings reader back to the rich meaning of the name of Ishmael → “God hears” – F/ ([m;v.]

Prayer (v. 18) Response (v. 20)

God heard Hagar (16:11)

God hears Abraham (17:20)

God will hear Ishmael (21:17)

→ Your God is the God who hears.

Some people were surprised to hear Hagar was saved ... well ... buckle up ... Ishmael was saved → **Gen 21:17, 20**

What about Galatians 4: 21-31

- the purpose of allegories in Scripture
- the point in Galatians is not the salvation or lack thereof of Isaac and Ishmael
- the point is the covenant of God

Now, “As for Ishmael ... **“behold, I will bless him”** with three results

1) **“and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly.”**

Posterity:

- **Abram** will be fruitful.
- **Sarai** will be fruitful.
- **Ishmael** will also be fruitful.

“**exceedingly**” - this is the same superlative as in 16:10; 17:3, 6

“**fruitful**” - same word as in the Creation Ordinance in 1:28; 9:1; 17:6 → Ishmael will play a role in the fulfillment of the Creation Ordinance

Royalty:

2) “He shall become the father of twelve princes,”

Royalty will also come from Ishmael

- Kings will come from Abraham and Sarah
- Princes will come from Ishmael

16:12 fulfilled in **25:18** → 17:20 fulfilled in **25:16**

3) “and I will make him a great nation”– singular

Part of the Abrahamic Covenant blessing – “I will make you a great nation” (12:2)

- Abraham, by virtue of his God-given name, is the father of many nations
- Ishmael is one of them
- the ethnicity of having multiple peoples is reserved for God’s chosen line → Abraham and Sarah, Isaac

Again God extends His blessings to those outside the covenant people of Israel

- the circle of worshippers of **hwhy** has always expanded beyond the members of the Israelite people
 - the true children of Abraham are all those from every language, tongue and tribe who believe.
- Good News for all the peoples.

Illustration – Gen 30:27 –

Laban to Jacob – “the LORD has blessed me on your account”

39:5 – Potiphar’s house in Egypt - “It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s (Potiphar) house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD’s blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.”

We see that in the case of Ishmael - he is blessed because of his association with Abraham.

From General Blessings to Particular Blessings:

Ishmael is not rejected by God as heir of the covenant because of any sin on his part. It is the divine choice by God of Isaac, before he was even born, that determines who is the son of the covenant.

Third Blessing is a Particular Blessing....

III. Isaac

Gen 17:19, 21

Point – **Isaac** is not one of the “As for ...,” but both Sarah’s and Ishmael’s have a qualifier ... a reminder of God’s sovereign plan.

The third person in this picture of God’s sovereign orchestration of human affairs is Isaac.

Proof – **Gen 17:19, 21**

God’s pleasure in giving Abraham and Sarah a son is greater than their doubts and weak-at-times faith.

“¹⁹**But God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son’**”

Isaac will be the covenant son & he will come from Sarah.

Four aspects of God’s sovereign plan for Isaac...God is sovereign over:

- 1. Identity**
- 2. Longevity**
- 3. Posterity**
- 4. Chronology**

Identity:

1) “**and you shall call his name Isaac**”

another new name – **Isaac - which means** “he laughs”

• as a result of Abraham’s reaction

Ishmael will be blessed, but the covenant belongs to **Isaac**.

- not to Ishmael
- not to the sons of Keturah (25:1-2)
- not to Abraham's concubines (25:6)

Longevity:

2) **“and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant”**

“**covenant**” – 13 times in Chapter 17 we see this word
 “**everlasting**” – 4 times we see this word – vv. 7, 8, 13, 19

Gen 26:2-5

Posterity:

3) **“for his descendants after him”**

Even before Isaac is conceived, God is discussing his children

Isaac is the link in the Messianic seed lineage started in 3:15

- Eve – Seth – Chapter 5 – Noah – Shem – tAdl. At of Shem (11:10-26) – Terah – Abraham – and now Isaac

Chronology:

4) ²¹**“But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.”**

“**this season**” – literally means “appointed time”

- a determined, set, or appointed time
- Gen 21:2
- in Leviticus 23 - you find the 7 Feasts – the feasts and festivals of Israel came to be known as the “appointed times” the ones set in place by hwhy. □ Lev 23:1-2

→ The time of Isaac's birth is not a random event.

It is in the proper time appointed by God, predestined by God, at a certain time preordained by God.

Illustration – Eccl 3:1-8 - God is the sovereign time keeper

Application – God has the appointed time, the right time for everything under the sun.

IV. Closing Revelation **Gen 17:22**

Point – God closes the door on further dialogue and debate. The meeting is adjourned and the theophany is officially ended.

Proof – **Gen 17:22** – “**And when He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.**”

These five speeches of God are bracketed by:

- appearance of God (1a) – “*YHWH* appeared to Abram”
- departure of God (22) – “*Elohim* went up from Abraham”

God goes up and closes His divine discourse.
A reminder that God’s abode is higher than the earth.

Now we move from the Covenant Blessings to.....

Covenant Obedience:

Abraham’s incredulity is very short-lived. Or at least it is overcome by obedience → faith works

We see in the example of Abraham.

→ Obedience without compromise and obedience without hesitation.

17:23 – Abraham circumcised all of his household according to the directions from God

This is a demonstration of a blameless walk - not a perfect walk.

17:26-27 – parallel wording 17:9-14 indicates Abraham’s total compliance with what was expected
→Obedience without compromise

The 1st Attribute of Abraham’s Obedience is Abraham ...

I. Obeyed without Compromise

Abraham circumcised all of his household according to the directions from God

He circumcised himself, Ishmael, all the servants, every male who was born in the house, and every male bought from a foreigner

Old Testament/Christian faith →What God commands is done.

Abraham stumbles, but obedient faith is characteristic of his life.

Circumcision is concrete way in which Abraham shows his faith
The summary statement of 17:1-2 – “walk and be blameless” is the umbrella over the exercise of the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, circumcision.

The 2nd Attribute of Abraham’s Obedience is Abraham ...

II. Obeyed without Hesitation

Read 17:23, 26

→the new element is “**very same day**”

All of chapter 17 took place on one day.

Abraham was quick to obey, in face of potential ridicule, opposition, and danger - the “**very same day**”

Psa 119:60 – “I hastened and did not delay To keep Thy commandments”

- That is what is characteristic of a believer.

Illustration – Couple in Issaquah WA home group lived together. They were saved on a Saturday and moved out on Sunday.

Abraham had a heart trained for quick obedience without compromise.

CONCLUSION