

genesis

God's Book of Beginnings

The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17)

The Abrahamic Covenant was introduced ^{Genesis 12:2-3} and then affirmed earlier ^{Genesis 15:18-21}.

It was confirmed here ^{Genesis 17:1-21}, and renewed later with Isaac ^{Genesis 26:2-5} and Jacob ^{Genesis 28:10-17}.

17:1-2 The LORD appeared to the ninety-nine year-old Abram to confirm His covenant with him.

The LORD referred to Himself as “God Almighty” (*El Shaddai*) (the first use of this title in the Bible).

17:3-8 God promised three times ^{v.4,5,6} that one thing resulting from His covenant would be Abram becoming the father of “many nations” ^{Romans 4:16-17}. As a sign of the covenant, God changed his name from Abram (“exalted father”) to Abraham (“father of many nations”). He also guaranteed His covenant with Abraham was “everlasting” ^{1 Chronicles 16:15-18, Luke 1:67-75}, the Promised Land (Canaan) would be (by divine right) an “everlasting possession” to Abraham and his descendants ^{Acts 7:5}, and He would always be the God of Abraham’s family.

Abraham’s “descendants” refers to his ‘spiritual offspring’, not to his ‘physical offspring’ ^{Romans 9:8}.

God’s promise for “many nations” to come from Abraham does not simply reflect the twelve tribes of Israel ^{Genesis 49:1-28}, but is a reference to many people groups who will be part of his descendants.

In both name changes (Abram ^{v.5} & Sarai ^{v.15}), God added the Hebrew letter (“h”) representing Him.

17:9-14 The covenant was one-way, but Abraham & descendants have responsibilities to fulfill, and will only experience God’s blessings when they live in obedience ^{Deuteronomy 4:25-31, 30:1-10}. The first command of God was for all of the males he was responsible for (including his slaves and the sons of his slaves) to be (ideally) circumcised at the age of eight days ^{Leviticus 12:3}.

A portion of Abraham’s descendants were repeatedly disobedient and then judged ^{Jeremiah 30:11}; however, there was never a time without an obedient remnant ^{Zephaniah 3:12-14}, but God would always be faithful to fulfill His promises to them ^{Jeremiah 46:27-28}. This is the same relationship God has with people who have been born again ^{John 3:3} (Christians ^{Acts 11:25-26}). Salvation results from a one-way, eternal covenant ^{Ephesians 2:8-9, John 10:27-30}, but once saved, a Christian must be obedient ^{1 John 2:5-6}.

Genesis 17-19

The sign of circumcision was announced after Abraham was called righteous ^{Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:9-10}. Abraham was called the father of the righteous ^{Romans 4:11-17}, and he was a symbol of Jesus, who was/is righteous ^{2 Peter 1:1, 1 John 2:1} and the true originator of all who are deemed righteous ^{2 Timothy 4:8}. The righteous of today (Christians) receive the seal of the Holy Spirit ^{2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 1:13-14}, because of a circumcised heart ^{Deuteronomy 30:6, Romans 2:28-29}. Furthermore, whether Christian or Jew, unbelief is described as having an uncircumcised heart ^{Jeremiah 9:25-26, Ezekiel 44:7-9}.

17:15-16 Abraham was told Sarai would be the “mother of nations” (mother of Abraham’s son). To honor her, God changed her name from Sarai (“my princess”) to Sarah (“princess”).

Sarah’s name (“Princess”) is appropriate since God stated she would be the mother of “kings” ^{v.16}.

17:17-18 Abraham laughed “to himself” that a son could be born to a hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year-old woman. Having ‘doubts’, he suggested Ishmael be the promised son.

Abraham appropriately showed great humility before God, but inappropriately expressed disbelief.

17:19-27 God firmly, but patiently reiterated to Abraham that his wife, Sarah, would “bear [him] a son” ^{v.16}, and He announced their son’s name would be Isaac (“he laughs”). God further pronounced that Isaac would be born in a year, and while He assured Abraham that Ishmael would be blessed, He promised He was going to “establish [His] covenant with [Isaac] as an everlasting covenant”. In obedience to God’s declaration of Abraham’s covenant responsibility ^{v.10-14}, Abraham had himself circumcised (at ninety-nine years old), as well as thirteen-year-old Ishmael and all of the other males under Abraham’s authority.

Ishmael’s blessings included that he would have 12 sons ^{Genesis 25:13-16}, just like Jacob ^{Genesis 35:22b-26}.

Preparing for the Judgement of Sodom (Genesis 18)

The Three Visiting Angels

18:1-5 The LORD appeared as one of three “men” to Abraham ^{v.13,17,20,22,26,33} near Mamre.

As soon as Abraham saw them, he immediately “bowed low to the ground” in humility.

Abraham insisted the three “men” must stop, wash, rest, eat and refresh, and they agreed.

One of the three “men” was a Christophany (preincarnate appearance of Jesus ^{Genesis 16:7, Exodus 3:14}).

Later, a single verse makes it clear that the other two “men” were in fact ‘normal’ angels ^{Genesis 19:1}.

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Genesis 17-19

18:6-8 Abraham, Sarah and their servants quickly prepared fine bread, a “choice, tender calf”, curds and milk. Remarkably, Abraham did not eat with the “men”, but he stood nearby.

The amount of bread mentioned here (3 seahs) is the same as in the parable of the yeast ^{Matthew 13:33}.

This was not considered a kosher meal, because meat and dairy were served together ^{Exodus 23:19}.

18:9-15 In response to an inquiry, Abraham told the “three men” that Sarah was in their tent.

The LORD repeated His promise they would have a son in a year’s time ^{Genesis 17:21, Romans 9:9}.

Sarah laughed “to herself” at this remark (as Abraham had done ^{Genesis 17:17}), and the LORD confronted Abraham about Sarah’s laughter. Embarrassed (and astonished), Sarah denied the truth of her laughter; however, the LORD reaffirmed that she had laughed ^{Psalms 139:1-5}.

The implied answer to Jesus’ rhetorical question: “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” is “No!”.

In the NT, both Gabriel ^{Luke 1:37} and Jesus ^{Matthew 19:26} emphatically gave this answer to that question.

Note that Jesus held Abraham responsible for Sarah’s inappropriate response to His proclamation.

18:16-21 The LORD reconfirmed Abraham’s special role in His plan for mankind ^{Galatians 3:8}, including sharing His plan ^{Amos 3:7} to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, because of their great sin.

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah had exceeded God’s depth of forgiveness ^{2 Kings 21:10-16, Mark 3:29}.

Abraham Pleads for Sodom

18:22-33 Abraham asked the LORD a series of questions about how many righteous must there be to stop the destruction: 50...45...40...30...20...10? At each level of the questions, the LORD said “for the sake of [that many, He] would not destroy the city”. When done, the LORD “left”.

Abraham’s questions illustrated his knowledge of God’s mercy and his responsibility to intervene for the righteous ^{Exodus 32:9-14}, because God already extended His mercy to Abraham ^{Genesis 12:10-20}.

Sodom and Gomorrah is Destroyed (Genesis 19)

19:1-5 When the two angels arrived at Sodom that evening, they found Lot at the city gate.

Lot managed to convince the angels to go with him to his house to eat and rest. They ate, but before they could go to bed, many men (of all ages and social standings) came to demand that Lot send out the visitors so they could have “sex with them” ^{Leviticus 18:22, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10}.

Lot being at the city gate indicated he was important and perhaps involved in city affairs ^{Job 29:7-17}.

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Lot had been living a worldly life in Sodom, which seems to indicate he was faltering in his internal struggle between his soul and flesh ^{2 Peter 2:7-8}. However, he still had some sense of decency, because he did recognize the special visitors (“my lords” ^{v.2}) and attempted to protect them.

The sin of Sodom was not just homosexuality, but also the widespread condoning and extent of it. The word ‘sodomite’ originated from Sodom’s pervasive homosexuality ^{Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:24-27}.

19:6-11 Lot began arguing with the mob without success, so he offered his two daughters.

However, the depraved men outside continued to demand the two angels come out to them. The angels reached out, pulled Lot in and “struck” the immoral men with “blindness”.

Much later, Peter (somewhat surprisingly) clearly declared Lot to be “a righteous man” ^{2 Peter 2:7}.

Peter went on to declare that Lot was “tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard” ^{2 Peter 2:8}. He was clearly upset by some types of immorality (homosexuality with angels), but not other types (offering his virgin daughters). However, some scholars have suggested Lot felt that offering his daughters was a less deviant kind of wickedness and so this offer was necessary to protect his guests. At the least, Lot’s ethics had been blurred, because of his life in a place of sin.

Lot’s daughters were obviously betrothed (i.e., “pledged to marry” ^{v.14}), but not yet wed (virgin).

The men were slaves to the sin of homosexuality; controlled by the spirit of the antichrist ^{1 John 4:3}.

Their lust was beyond restraint, exhibiting insatiable desires ^{Jude 1:7} even after being blinded.

19:12-15 The angels told Lot of their plan to completely destroy Sodom, and instructed him to gather everyone “who belongs to you”. Lot tried to convince his daughters’ fiancés to leave the city before the destruction, but the men simply laughed at his counsel ^{Psalms 2:4, Luke 8:51-53}.

Angels removing the righteous people ^{2 Peter 2:7} from Sodom is symbolic of the rapture ^{Matthew 24:30-31}.

The cavalier response of the “sons-in-law” indicated their sins blinded them ^{Zephaniah 1:17, 2 Corinthians 4:4}.

19:16-23 The angels had to take Lot and his family by their hands and drag them from Sodom. One of the angels told them to head for the mountains and not look back, but Lot argued that they could not make it, so the angels allowed them to go to the town of Zoar (“small”).

An angel indicated Zoar was also to be destroyed, but received mercy, because of Lot’s request ^{v.21}.

The obvious fact Lot had not won any converts for the LORD in Sodom, combined with his hesitation to leave Sodom and desire to go to Zoar are other signs of the intensity of his spiritual struggles.

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19:24-26 By raining “down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah” in the morning, the LORD produced the death of every living thing and “overthrew” both cities and “the entire plain”. Lot’s wife disobeyed the angel’s command ^{v.17} by looking back at Sodom, and she “became a pillar of salt”, while Lot & daughters did not, proving the importance of obedience ^{Luke 17:29-33}.
Jesus used Sodom’s judgement to illustrate what happens to the wicked ^{Matthew 10:14-15, Luke 17:29-30}.
Burning sulfur is the key component in hell, the place of eternal judgement ^{Revelation 19:20, 20:10, 21:8}.
Every living thing being killed in Sodom is an example of God achieving His judgement completely.
In addition, the Lord intends in the future to totally destroy Babylon in the same way ^{Isaiah 13:19}.
However, when Joshua was given the charge to carry out God’s judgement ^{Deuteronomy 7:1-5, 20:16-17},
he (and his successors) failed to achieve God’s instructions completely ^{Joshua 23:12-13, Judges 1:21,27-33}.
As a consequence of their disobedience, the sinful Canaanites corrupted the Israelites ^{Judges 3:5-7},
just as God had warned the Israelites would happen ^{Leviticus 18:24-28, Deuteronomy 7:3-4, 18:9,12, 20:18}.

19:27-30 Abraham woke up the next day and went to the place where he and the LORD had spoken the night before ^{Genesis 18:16} and saw the smoke rising from the judged cities and plain. The cities were destroyed, but God “brought Lot out of the catastrophe”, for Abraham’s sake. Lot and his daughters left Zoar in fear (why?), and went to live in a cave in the mountains.
As mentioned earlier, Peter declared Lot was “a righteous man” ^{2 Peter 2:7}; however, **Moses made an interesting point here: Lot was removed from Sodom, because God “remembered Abraham”**.
A question: Why did Lot and his daughters go to the mountains, instead of going back to Abraham?
Throughout the Bible caves are utilized as (1) hideouts for fearful people ^{1 Samuel 13:5-6, 1 Kings 19:1-9},
(2) retreats for evil people attempting to hide ^{Joshua 10:16-18,22-27, Isaiah 2:19-21, Ezekiel 33:27, Revelation 6:15-17}
and (3) temporary sanctuaries for Godly people ^{1 Kings 18:1-4, Jeremiah 49:8,30}.

19:31-38 In another example of Lot and family not trusting in God’s provision, his daughters carried out a plan to get pregnant through incest. Both the daughters did become pregnant, and named their sons Moab (“from father”) and Ben-Ammi (“son of my father’s people”).
The thinking/actions of his daughters indicated the sort of spiritual leader Lot was ^{v.30-36, Galatians 6:7}.
Later, both the Moabites ^{2 Kings 1:1} **and the Ammonites** ^{Judges 10:9, 11:4} **became Israel’s bitter enemies.**

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