

June 20: Overview of Genesis 17–18

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

1 summary

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, the Lord appears to Abram. In a series of speeches God announces that he will establish an eternal covenant with Abram and his offspring. This covenant will involve Abram as the father of many nations; consequently, his name is changed to “Abraham.” The sign of the covenant is circumcision. In the future this covenant will be established with Isaac but not Ishmael, (although the latter, by being circumcised, will enjoy some of the benefits of the covenant). Most of the chapter consists of a divine speech that focuses on the part to be played by God (vv. 4–8), Abraham (vv. 9–14), and Sarah (vv. 15–16). The nature and contents of the covenant distinguish it from the covenant of ch. 15, which is solely about future nationhood.¹

The following table helps to clarify the descendants of Abraham:

Four Kinds of Abraham’s Offspring

OFFSPRING	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLES
Natural, physical offspring	Physical descendants of Abraham	Ishmael, Isaac, the sons of Keturah (and by extension Esau, Jacob, etc.)
Natural, yet special offspring	Physical descendants of Abraham especially tied to God’s elective and saving purposes	Isaac (by extension Jacob and the entire nation of Israel)
Promised offspring	The true, unique offspring of Abraham	A distinctive line of offspring, starting earlier with Seth and continuing through Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel, and David, culminating in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16)
Spiritual offspring	Those united with Christ (the promised offspring)	Jews and Gentiles who trust in the Messiah ²

¹ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 79.

² Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 79.

2

questions

1. What most stood out to you related to the message? Why?
2. When you compare 16:16 and 17:1, you see that Ishmael is 13 years old when we begin chapter 17. It appears that Abraham thought God had already given him a son. How do you think he must have felt when God repeated his promise of a son again?
 - **Insight** – “for the last thirteen years, Abraham has lived in the belief that Ishmael, the son of his old age, is the promised son and that God’s covenant will be carried out through him. All of his love, all of his hopes, and all of his dreams have been poured into this boy, and it is not unlikely that they have already discussed Ishmael’s covenant destiny. Abraham has not been anxiously awaiting the arrival of another son. He would not have seen a need for another, nor has God informed him otherwise.”³
3. It is easy to look at the life of Abraham from the perspective we have today of God’s work in believer’s lives. But Abraham didn’t have that perspective. The news of a son through Sarah at their ages is shocking to them.
4. What stands out to you about Abraham and Sarah “laughing” when they hear God’s promise of a child?
 - **Insight** – The word “laughter” can express “an attitude toward something that is claimed but seems impossible to realize, . . . God can create laughter, joy, where otherwise there would be none (Genesis 21:6).”⁴
 - When something as incredible as this is declared, the human response is consistent: like **Sarah**, people are taken off guard, **laugh**, and then out of fear deny that they laughed (18:15). But God knows human hearts and that Christians often do stagger at what He says He can do.⁵

³ John H. Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 451.

⁴ Warren Baker and Eugene E. Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 946.

⁵ Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 59.

5. The name Isaac means "he laughs." What do you think Abraham thought of every time he called his son by that name?

6. Where have you seen God work in your life that your response has been amazement. Something that God did that seemed so impossible that you never expected it and now stand in amazement of his work in your life?

7. How have you seen Frank's statement in your life: "it is not easy to live by faith, but God's desire is to strengthen us"?