

Bible Passage**Genesis 17:1-8**

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, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ “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, but your name shall be Abraham, 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.”

Outline**I. An Everlasting Covenant**

- Understanding the covenant's origin: from creation to the fall of humanity.
- The aftermath of the Great Flood and God's promise never to wipe out humanity again.
- Emphasizing God's nature of incredible grace and mercy: A promise that stands the test of time.
- The importance of grasping the everlasting nature of God's covenant despite human actions or historical events.

II. The Gracious Gift of Covenant

- Introduction to Abraham and his transformation: From Abram (a singular father) to Abraham (father of many nations).
- The shift in God's relationship with humanity: "I am YOUR God."
- The personalized bond between God and His chosen ones.
- God's covenant being based on grace, not works: the importance of the phrase "I am your God, and you are my people."
- The story of Abraham and Sarah's impatience, resulting in the birth of Ishmael, serves as an example of human attempts to fulfill divine promises.

- The lesson from Galatians: human attempts at fulfilling divine covenants lead to spiritual bondage, while patience and faith lead to God's promises.

III. The Lesson of Abraham's Life

- Understanding Abraham's challenges and temptations: His longing for a child and the human tendency to "fix" things.
- Reflection of modern struggles: choosing our solutions instead of waiting on God's intervention.
- Learning from Abraham's mistakes: the virtue of patience and absolute faith in God's promises.
- The importance of spiritual discernment in modern conflicts.
- The role of the Western Church: focusing on repentance and trusting God's divine plan.
- Being grafted into God's promise: bound by faith, not works.
- Concluding thoughts: Choosing God's plan and timing over our own desires and understanding.

Conclusion:

- The story of Abraham serves as a testament to God's unyielding grace and the nature of the covenant.
- A call to action: reflecting on our personal journey, understanding God's promises, and putting God first in our decisions.
- A reminder that God's plans for us are perfect and worth waiting for.

Notes

In our journey of faith, diving deep into scriptures and understanding God's word is essential. Today, we'll explore the foundation of a covenant, specifically the one made between God and Abraham. The series aims to spark meaningful conversations for small groups, focusing on the bond God wishes to forge with humanity through covenants. It's intriguing that when covenants are mentioned in the scriptures, the Israelites or the chosen people of God are predominantly highlighted. And while the topic of Israel might bring modern-day issues to mind, it's crucial first to grasp the ancient context.

At its core, a covenant represents the relationship between God and humanity. From the time of creation, when God made mankind in His image, He initiated a covenant of work. Humanity was destined to work, steward creation, and embody the image of God. But this divine design was broken when mankind fell into sin, leading to a curse where work became toil, and God's creation was marred by the devastating impacts of sin. Observing the rampant sin during the days of Noah, God decided to cleanse His creation. This decision culminated in the Great Flood. But after the Flood, God made a profound promise – He would never again wipe out humanity. This promise symbolized God's incredible grace, underscoring His merciful nature even as Creator.

While God had made a universal promise to all creation, He then chose to narrow His focus to one individual – Abraham. To Abraham, He made a special promise, transforming him from

Abram (a singular father) to Abraham (father of many nations). This was not based on Abraham's merit but was a testament to God's boundless grace. This covenant with Abraham marked a paradigm shift. It was no longer just about God as the Creator and humans as His creation. Now, God was saying, *"I am YOUR God."* This personalized relationship between God and His chosen ones set a new precedent, reinforcing God's sovereignty.

It's tempting to connect the dots between the ancient covenant and the current situation in the Middle East. The Israelites in the Old Testament certainly understood the Abrahamic covenant and the promise of the "Promised Land." It was this divine promise that drove them, led by Joshua, to claim the land of Canaan. As we fast forward through Biblical history, we encounter the times of the prophets, the Assyrian and Babylonian empires, and their conquests of Israel. These events might seem contradictory to God's everlasting promise, but we must remember the divine nature of the covenant. It's based on God's grace, not our actions. The everlasting covenant is a reflection of God's unyielding grace and mercy. As we navigate modern challenges, understanding this foundational relationship between God and humanity offers clarity, purpose, and hope.

The story of Abraham, the first patriarch of the Israelites, serves as a cornerstone in understanding the relationship between God and His chosen people. But beneath its surface lies a profound lesson about grace, commitment, and our human attempts to understand divine providence. The lands of the Bible have seen countless conflicts, with empires like the Babylonians and Romans seizing control only to lose it again. Yet, the

persistent question that looms in the background of these narratives is: if Israel is ever lost as a nation, does it signify God's broken covenant?

Understanding this requires a deeper dive into the nature of God's covenants and promises. Unlike our human understanding, where a promise might be contingent on certain actions, God's covenant with Abraham was not based on works or actions but rather on grace and relationship. This is not to say that Israel didn't face consequences for their actions. Indeed, the Babylonian captivity was a stark reminder of the need to return to God. However, the true essence of the covenant lies in its unconditionality. The phrase "I am your God, and you are my people" encapsulates the depth and breadth of this bond. This connection isn't about how much one does to earn God's favor. It's about the relationship.

Abraham himself was by no means perfect. Yet, God chose him, not purely because of his faith, but because of God's sovereign will. Romans 4 beautifully encapsulates this: Abraham's righteousness was not about his deeds but about his faith. This counters a common misconception among believers that one's blessings are proportional to one's faith. This is a toxic mentality, stripping away the very nature of grace. In essence, blessings are not wages earned but gifts received.

Drawing a parallel, consider the bond between a parent and child. Children may believe that their parents' love hinges on their achievements, but authentic parental love is unconditional. Similarly, God's covenant with Israel is not dependent on their actions but is grounded in sheer grace and love.

This doesn't mean Israel went unpunished for its transgressions. But punishments like the Babylonian exile were not signs of a broken covenant. They were reminders of the need to return to God's embrace. Even in moments of despair and rebellion, God's enduring love for Israel remains.

The story of Abraham and God's covenant is a powerful reminder of the nature of divine grace. Our challenge, like Abraham's, is to understand and accept this grace, recognizing that the true essence of our bond with God is not transactional but relational.

Throughout history, there have been stories of faith, patience, and the promise of God. One such story revolves around Abraham, the father of many nations. Abraham, at the age of 99, was promised by God to be the father of numerous nations. Can you imagine how he must have felt, yearning for children, yet being made to wait nearly a century?

However, rather than waiting patiently and acting in faith, Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands. They decided to forge their path to fulfill God's promise. This path involved Sarah's maid, Hagar, and the birth of Ishmael. This act serves as a lesson in human impatience and a desire to "fix" situations instead of letting God's plan unfold naturally. It's a reflection of our modern struggle where we often choose our solutions instead of waiting on God's divine intervention. Yet, God, in his infinite wisdom, used this very mistake to teach us a vital lesson. Through the Apostle Paul, in Galatians, God reminded us that human attempts to fulfill divine covenants result in spiritual bondage, while patience and faith bring about the

promises of God. When we strive to achieve God's promises in our strength, we miss the beauty of his miraculous power.

Today, many are torn about the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, questioning which side to support. The situation provides a stark reminder of the importance of spiritual discernment, submission to God's plan, and the dangers of blind allegiance. Aligning with any imperfect human institution always comes with its pitfalls. In such turbulent times, it's crucial to remember the core of our faith. Jesus died for the sins of all, and he sees everyone, be it Palestinian or Israeli, as his beloved. Instead of taking sides, we should pray for peace and for hearts to turn to Jesus.

The Western Church, distanced from the immediate conflict, can learn a valuable lesson from Abraham's story. We too should focus on repentance and trust in God's divine plan. We've been grafted into God's promise, and when He looks at us, He sees the children of the covenant – bound by faith, not works. In conclusion, let Abraham's story remind us of the virtue of patience, the value of absolute faith in God's promises, and the necessity of putting God's plan above our own. When faced with challenges, big or small, let's choose to wait on Him, knowing that His plans for us are always perfect.