

God Confirmation of His Covenant with Abraham

Genesis 22:15-24

Genesis 22:15-24 - "Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, ¹⁶ and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— ¹⁷ that in blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba." ²⁰ Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, "Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: ²¹ Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, ²² Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." ²³ And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴ His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah."

Background Notes

In Genesis 22 we have the supreme test of Abraham's faith. He was asked to give up - to sacrifice - his beloved son Isaac. Abraham passed the test, even though Isaac was not literally sacrificed. At the last minute God provided a ram for the sacrifice in place of Isaac.

However, God looks on the heart. God saw the reality of Abraham's faith, even to the point of giving up his son Isaac to the Lord. And God looks on our hearts as He tests our faith. We can pass the tests, or we can fail the tests of faith that God allows to come into our lives.

After Abraham passed this supreme test of faith, and even before he and Isaac left the Mount Moriah area, God confirmed His covenant with Abraham. In verse 17, God said to Abraham, "*Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.*"

In an interesting commentary on this passage, Dr. Henry M. Morris made some rough calculations for the number of stars and the number of grains of sand on the seashores around the world. Guess what? Both numbers come out about the same: ten to the twenty-fifth. That is a one followed by *twenty-five* zeroes – a *big* number!

The main point here, of course, is that Abraham's descendants would be innumerable, and that certainly has come true. Verse 17 says, "your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies." The walled cities of ancient times had massive gates and gate structures, and the city's defenses were strongest at the gates. In addition, all the major governmental decisions of the city were made at the gate. So to "possess the gate of your enemies" meant to completely conquer your enemies. This prophecy came true when Israel conquered Canaan under Joshua.

In verse 18 we have the wonderful promise of the coming Messiah: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." That verse is speaking of Jesus Christ. We can be sure of that, because Galatians 3:16 quotes this verse: "*Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ.*" That quote is taken right from Genesis 22:18. It is a Messianic prophecy.

In verses 20-24 we have the record of the descendants of Nahor, Abraham's brother. The primary reason for including this record is to give us Rebekah's lineage. Rebekah became Isaac's wife, and through them the promised blessings would be carried to the next generation.

Doctrinal Points

1. Blessing follows obedience.

Why was Abraham promised such blessing? Verses 17-18: "*blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.*" Why such blessing? There it is, at the end of verse 18: "*because you have obeyed My voice.*"

When the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were confirmed to Isaac in Genesis 26:5, the Lord gave the same reason for the covenant blessings: "*because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.*"

When the Mosaic Law was given, in Deuteronomy 11:26-28 God said: "*Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.*" **Obedience is the key to God's blessing.** Blessing follows obedience. This is a divine principle! Do you want blessing in your life? Blessing follows obedience!

This principle is illustrated by a study of two families that was done some years ago by a sociologist in New York State. It is known as the “Jukes-Edwards Study.” One family was the family of Max Jukes and the other was the family of Jonathan Edwards. As you know, Jonathan Edwards was a major force in the “First Great Awakening” here in America in the 1700s. Max Jukes was a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards, but he was an unbeliever, a man of no principles, and he married a woman of similar character. What happened to those families in subsequent generations?

Over 1200 descendants of Max Jukes were studied. 310 were “career” vagrants and 440 were physically wrecked by lives of debauchery and immorality. 130 were sent to prison for an average of 13 years each: 7 were murderers, 100 were alcoholics, 60 were habitual thieves, and 190 were prostitutes. Of the 20 who learned a trade, 10 learned their trade in prison. **None** of them made a significant contribution to society. On the contrary, they collectively cost the state of New York \$1,200,000.00 - and that amount was figured by the costs of many years ago.

Jonathan Edwards came from a Christian family and he married a girl of like character. Among his descendants were 300 clergymen, missionaries, or theological professors. Over 100 were college professors and 14 were university presidents. More than 100 were lawyers, and 30 of them became judges. Over 60 were physicians, and more than 60 were authors of good books. Many became giants in American industry. Three were U.S. Congressmen, and one was Vice President of the United States.

So you see, even the world recognizes that the results of a faithful, obedient, Christian lifestyle are far better than the results of a life that denies or ignores biblical commands. How much more should we as Christians appreciate this truth? Blessing follows obedience!

2. Confirmation follows obedience.

The covenant that God made with Abraham was established back in Genesis 12, at least 40 years before this time. Over the years, God had confirmed His covenant with Abraham several times. It was an **unconditional covenant**. This means that the fulfillment of the covenant was not dependent on Abraham’s obedience. However, because Abraham obeyed, God once again confirmed the covenant. What a wonderful experience that must have been for Abraham, to have the Lord personally speak to him and confirm His promises! Confirmation follows obedience.

The same is true for us. The Christian life is a step-by-step walk of faith. How can we be sure of the steps? How do we know if we have made the right decisions? Answer: Obey! Obey in all areas of your life - in the “*big*” areas of obedience as well as the *small* details of God’s commands. Confirmation of your decisions will follow obedience.

God confirms the steps of faith of the obedient Christian. You don’t have to worry about making mistakes, or making the wrong decision when it comes to job changes, or moves, or family decisions - as long as you are an obedient Christian. God loves to guide the steps and confirm the steps of obedient Christians.

Many times the Lord has confirmed our move to the Midwest area many years ago. I was studying in New England, and liked living in the northeast. But we believed that God was calling us to the ministry at Emmaus Bible College. We took the step of faith and moved to the Midwest, and the Lord has definitely confirmed that step many times.

Are you wondering why you feel unsure and confused about your decisions in life? Do you wonder why God is not confirming your walk of faith at the present time? Do a self-check. Ask yourself: am I an obedient Christian in the “*big*” commands as well as the “*small*” commands of Scripture? Remember, confirmation follows obedience.

Practical Application

“It’s not over until it’s over.”

That’s *not* a verse in the Bible! It’s a quote from Yogi Berra, former coach of the New York Yankees baseball team. He meant, of course, that the ball game wasn’t over until “Out #3” in the ninth inning of the game. We can apply that quotation to the Christian’s life of faith. “It’s not over until it’s over” in the life of faith - until we die or the Lord returns for us, because there is no need for faith in Heaven. The opportunity to live by faith is *now!* Until that time, we walk by faith “until it’s over.”

In Genesis 22 Abraham passed a giant test of faith – but that didn’t mean that he no longer had to walk by faith. It didn’t mean that there would be no more tests of his faith. Abraham faced many more tests of faith. In Genesis 23 his faith was tested at the time of Sarah’s death and burial. Abraham lived about forty years after Sarah died, and he had to keep walking by faith. His life of faith was not over until it was over.

This is true for us, too. It is not over just because we pass some major test of our faith. When we pass through a major test of faith, we may tend to sit back and think, “Well, it’s over - I passed the test!” No! That’s a dangerous thought! Hang in there and keep walking by faith, because “It’s not over until it’s over!”