

## 99-01-10a

Let's begin our worship this morning with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for the wonderful nation in which we live.

We thank you for our system of government that was put in place by men who, as a group, were almost all entirely believers, who understood biblical principles of authority and who drafted our Constitution and put in place a system that guarantees our freedom and that stands up to the tests of time. We thank you for the plan of salvation. We thank you for your Word and for the place that we occupy in your plan, sustained by your Word and your Spirit.

We pray this morning as we study the Word that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding that we will perceive these things are right and in so doing we will strengthen our souls and be more closely conformed to the image of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for those who are not with us this morning that you will grant them safety and blessing wherever they may be and that the truth that is resident in their souls will continue to be a source of meditation and of guidance and strength each day. We pray that in our conduct, in our fellowship, our conversation, our thoughts, our motivations, we will be pleasing in your sight.

We thank you again for your blessings and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We have just read what the connection is between Mark chapter 9 and our study of God's declaration of covenant promise to Abraham in Genesis 17.

But we will soon see that these passages in fact address in radically different ways the same general area of truth. In Mark chapter 9, verse 38, we find ourselves in the middle of Jesus teaching His disciples who have been disputing over who is the greatest. This began up in verse 33.

When He asks them what were they arguing about, they keep silent. They don't want to admit that they were arguing about which of them is the greatest or would be the greatest. So in verse 35, He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.

Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. When He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me. Whoever receives Me receives not Me, but Him who sent Me.

This is a reminder to us that our relationship, the primary focus of our relationship with God is with God the Father. Not to take anything away from our appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ and our standing in Him and our desire to grow in grace and knowledge of Him, but His purpose was to come and make a way to the Father. No man comes to the Father but by Me.

When you receive Me, you're receiving the Father. Jesus Christ, that's why He is called the Way, with a capital W, because He brings us to the Father, and it is the Father with whom we have our relationship. Paul the Apostle and the other apostles call believers brethren, but that's our relationship with each other.

We don't primarily think of ourselves as brothers of Christ. We think of ourselves as sons of God, as children of God, children of the Father. Our prayer is probably the most significant reminder of this fact.

Jesus never encouraged us, the apostles never encouraged us to pray to the Lord Jesus Christ. And you think, well, if my relationship is with Jesus Christ, why do I never speak with Him? How come I don't pray to Jesus and say, Oh, Jesus, help me. Jesus, strengthen me, and so forth.

There's not a single example of appeal or prayer of any sort to the Lord Jesus Christ anywhere in the New Testament. All of our examples, which are abundant, by the way, Paul records his prayers in virtually every epistle he wrote. And he always says, I bow my knee to the Father.

I pray to the Father. I make my appeal to the Father. Why is that? Because our relationship is with the Father.

Jesus died to bring us to the Father. And we want to be careful in making this point, not to somehow seem to be disparaging the Lord Jesus Christ or that our standing and relationship with Him is unimportant. It is no less important, however strongly you may think of it.

We don't need to diminish that at all. But we need to recognize what its purpose is. Jesus Christ came to establish our relationship with the Father.

And you see that throughout the Scriptures. This is another example in verse 37. When you receive the Lord Jesus, actually when you receive one of these little ones in His name, you're receiving Him and not Him but the Father.

So the way that we treat each other, the way that we treat little ones in the faith, those who are less mature, those who are less knowledgeable, those who are less able, who have fewer resources at their disposal, that's what it means to be a child, to be dependent on others, to be in the process of learning from others and in the process of growth, somewhat behind where we ourselves are. The way we treat each other, the way we treat fellow believers, especially those who are behind us in terms of growth and maturity, that is a reflection of attitude toward Jesus Christ and through Him a reflection of our attitude and our relationship with God the Father Himself. So that when you meditate on that a little bit, we should treat each other based on our relationship with the Father.

When we look at others, we're not looking at them, we're not treating them based on who and what they are so much as we are honoring our Father. We are doing all things heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. Even when you're dealing directly with another person, we do that not unto them but unto the Lord.

And this is where the thoughts and intents of the heart are so important. So then you have the man who's following along, casting out demons in Jesus' name. The disciples try to forbid him and so forth.

But Jesus doesn't get distracted. He continues to say, this is another example of the same principle. Don't worry about what he's doing or why he's doing it or whether or not he's following with us.

He says, He who is not against us is on our side. Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. And he kind of reverses the perspective.

If someone treats you in honor of the Lord, he will not lose his reward. Then in verse 42, he picks up the thread of what he began talking about up in 36 and 37. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble.

And this is the transition where Jesus makes sure we understand what the little child represents. It's not just any child. One of these little ones who believe in me.

And he's transitioning from the illustration to the actual principle involved. One of these little ones who believe in me to stumble. It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

If your hand causes you to sin, and this is a rather free translation of the Greek verb skandalizo, from where we get the noun scandal in English. Something offensive. Literally in Greek, skandalizo means to cause to stumble, to ensnare, to trip.

It was used of a bent sapling. They would bend the sapling over and tie its top to the ground along a path so that a fleeing animal, they would go to the other side and beat the brush, and the animal would start to flee running down its familiar trail. And as it turns a corner, suddenly this sapling has been across the trail and it stumbles and falls.

And that enables the pursuers to catch up and snare it. So it is something that causes to stumble, to trip. Something that stops your progress.

And Jesus says, if your hand causes you to stumble, scandalizes you, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed rather than having two hands to go to Gehenna, into the fire that shall never be quenched. If your foot, down in verse 45, you have the worm does not die, the fire is not quenched, although this is not in that verse 44, is an interpolation from another passage by a scribe.

There are other places where this is quoted, but not here. If your foot, in verse 45, causes you to sin, cut it off. I guess, in other words, what I'm saying is in Mark, you can cross out verse 44.

It's really not there. Same thing about the foot. If it causes you to stumble, cut it off.

It is better for you to enter life lame rather than having two feet to be cast into Gehenna. This is not hell. This is not eternal damnation.

This is a different fire. This is the fire of judgment. This is the fire that destroys unfruitful works.

It is Gehenna. It is not the lake of fire mentioned in Revelation. And once again, verse 46, it is not found in the original, in fact, even the last part of verse 45, the fire that shall never be quenched.

From where it says, into the fire that shall not be quenched all the way through 46, that is a later addition to the manuscript. It's not there. People misunderstood and thought this was the eternal lake of fire that's not quenched and that has its own place, but that's not what's in view here.

This is the fire of judgment. This is the fire that evaluates the fruit of the life. You cannot, by stumbling or causing someone to stumble, suffer eternal damnation in the lake of fire.

That is not the basis. The basis of that is, what do you think of Christ? Do you trust Him for salvation or not? The idea of stumbling, the idea of your walk, your lifestyle, your deeds, or your influence on others and their walk and their deeds has nothing to do with eternal salvation. This passage does not teach that, but those early on who misunderstood that have tried to harmonize it with some other passages that do talk about the lake of fire.

Verse 47, Even if your eye causes you to offend, causes you to stumble, pluck it out. Better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye. What is entering the kingdom of God? You remember our studies about the kingdom of God.

There's a big difference between seeing the kingdom, being resurrected during the kingdom, and entering the kingdom. Entering the kingdom is not a synonym for salvation. It is a synonym for reward.

Not all who are resurrected and will be alive in the millennium will enter the kingdom. The planet earth is a big place. Most of the planet is going to be occupied by those who have not entered the kingdom.

The historical boundaries of the promised land, which contains Jerusalem and the throne of David where Jesus will reside, occupying that parcel of land is a blessing. It is a reward

reserved for those who have lived their life a certain way after their salvation. This is why Jesus is very precise in the language that he uses.

It is better for you to separate from something that seems essential to you, an eye, a hand, or a foot, if it is causing you to offend, if it is causing you to stumble, it is better to cut that off, however painful that may be, however you may think it's going to disable you. It's better to do that and not lose your eternal reward than to keep this thing that seems so important and have the fruit of your life burned up in the fire of judgment. That's the picture.

It's fairly simple, but it's been amazingly distorted now through the history of Christian interpretation. But we have here the idea of cutting off something that represents unfruitfulness, cutting off association with sin, cutting off association with evil, cutting off association with the power of the flesh, the eye, the hand, and the foot. These are the powers that our body possesses to see, to function, to walk, to manipulate.

The word manipulate, the first syllable in that, M-A-N, manu, is, I think, Latin for hand. Manuscript, written by hand. Manumission is to release someone's hands, to free them from slavery.

So, the hand, the foot, the eye, these are considered to be essential. No one wants to lose these. But Jesus says, even something that seemingly essential, it is better to separate from that if it is causing you to stumble, because that stumbling will result in loss of reward.

If you don't separate from that stumbling, if you continue to stumble, if you continue to fall victim to this area of weakness, you lose your reward. The fruit of your life goes up in smoke. In verse 49, everyone will be seasoned with fire.

The last part of that verse is also missing in most of the best manuscripts. Everyone will be seasoned with fire. Everyone will be judged.

Everyone will be evaluated. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its savor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves and have peace with one another. This is lifestyle.

These are lifestyle choices. He doesn't say, believe in me and avoid the fire, does he? Because this is not a salvation passage. He's talking to his disciples.

He has set a child in front of them. They're arguing about who's going to be the greatest. He's telling them how to be great in the kingdom.

Separate from the things that cause you to stumble, however painful, however radical that may be. It is as radical as plucking out your eye or cutting off your hand or chopping off your foot to not lose your eternal reward. It's a matter of establishing the priority of the eternal over the temporal.

Well, this that we find in Mark chapter 9 and its parallels in the Gospels finds its first really full expression or certainly one of the first expressions back in our passage in Genesis chapter 17 where we resume our study this morning of the life of Abraham. You recall last time that as we moved into chapter 17 we saw that when Abram was 99 years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am Almighty God. I am El Shaddai.

Walk before my face and be blameless. Be complete. Be perfect.

Be without defect. And we spent all of our time last Sunday examining those two statements. What does it mean to walk before God? What does it mean to be without deficit? To be without lack? How can we arrive at and maintain that status before God? That is the condition of the covenant.

God says walk before me and be blameless and I will make my covenant between me and you. And this is where we need to return to a study that we did earlier clear back in Genesis chapter 6 and following where we saw God speak in covenant terms to Noah. And we saw that when God said to Noah back in Genesis chapter 6 and verse 18 God tells Noah He is going to destroy the earth by a flood and in verse 18 He says, but I will establish my covenant with you and you shall go into the ark you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

You may recall at that time that we took a close look at what God said there when He says I will establish my covenant with you. That was the word for establish literally means to lift up. That's its root or its core meaning to lift up.

It's the Hebrew verb *kum* Q-U-M And it winds up going through all kinds of contortions because of its structure. But its meaning in the non-literal world in the figurative sense or in non-literal contexts is to accomplish, to continue, to confirm, to sustain, to make good. To accomplish, continue, confirm, sustain, to make good.

We noted at that time that God already had a covenant relationship with Noah. And when God comes to Noah and says a flood is coming that's going to destroy the world He says, but I will confirm my covenant with you. My relationship with you is going to be sustained.

I'm going to preserve you through this judgment and through this disaster in compliance with or as an expression of our existing covenant. This was not a new covenant that was set up on the day that God appeared to Noah. Noah was a righteous man upright in his generations, it says.

God and Noah were already in covenant relationship and God is saying here I will confirm my covenant with you. I'm going to It's like what he says to Moses over in Exodus 34 I will have compassion on whom I have had compassion. I will have mercy on whom I have had mercy.

I will continue my covenant blessing to those with whom I have a covenant relationship going back to the past. So it was important for us to see here that this was not the initiation of something new but the continuance of something that already existed. Well, guess what? In Genesis chapter 17 and verse 2 when God says I will make my covenant that word is kum.

It is I will confirm. I will continue to honor. I will sustain.

I will accomplish. I will continue to bless under the terms of my covenant between me and you and multiply you exceedingly. We know this because we have at least two previous statements of the covenant that we've already studied in Genesis, don't we? Going all the way back to chapter 12.

So this is not a new covenant. This is a confirmation. It's in some ways an expansion in terms of detail.

How God is going to confirm, sustain, continue, perpetuate this covenant. But why is this important here? We belabor this point a little bit and see its parallels in Scripture. Why is it important? These passages are often appealed to by those who stress and over-emphasize the sovereign will of God.

God's seemingly arbitrary choice of certain individuals to accomplish His plan. Reformed or covenant theology. It's called covenant theology because it goes to these covenants and says look, here is God sovereignly marking out some individual who is equally depraved, equally hopeless, helpless, and useless in the human race.

But God in His inscrutable sovereign will reached down and picked Noah. He reached down in His sovereign, inscrutable will and He picked Abraham. He said, you're like all these other people, but I'm going to use you to demonstrate what I can do by way of transformation.

I'm going to use you. I'm going to make a covenant with you. I'm going to accomplish it.

It's unconditional, they say. It's all dependent on me. There's nothing that depends on you.

And the stress, and it's a difficult thing to talk about because there are elements of this that are true. Is God sovereign? Yes. Did God choose Noah? Did God choose Abraham? Yes, He did.

But where it goes astray is in seeking, and I think sometimes honestly, to try to honor God and to recognize His greatness and all of the omnis that are in His character, His omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, His sovereign power. Even when you're talking about God, you can unbalance. If you over-emphasize the attributes of God and under-emphasize the responsibility that is assigned to man, even in the act of glorifying

God or what you think is glorifying Him, you distort Him.

You put Him under such a big magnifying glass that you miss other things. And that's what happens with these passages. So, for our own understanding and our own sense of balance, we recognize that here, God is precise in His language.

And He says, I am confirming a covenant with you. You walk before Me. You walk in front of My face.

You walk with the knowledge and the constant awareness that My eye is upon you, that you are before My face. You be complete. You be blameless.

It doesn't mean that you've never sinned. It doesn't mean that you've never failed. But you restore yourself through acknowledgement of sin, through returning to God, seeking His experiential forgiveness and cleansing.

You restore yourself, wash yourself and be clean. This is what the Israelites will do in future generations, isn't it? They incur ritual impurity all the time. They touch a dead thing.

They have a bodily emission. They come down with a disease. Women, every month, become ritually unclean for a week or so.

And there is a means of purification. They can once again approach. They can once again worship.

They can once again be considered blameless because they have been purified by obedience, by following God's instructions. And by coming to God and recognizing, having faith in those instructions, that when they take those steps, when they are sprinkled with the blood as priests, when they come before God and offer sacrifice, they are made clean. They have faith in that.

And they approach God without fear of death or discipline because they have confidence in the act of God in cleansing them because they have come to Him in obedience. So, this is God's instruction to Abram. Walk before me and be blameless and I will confirm, I will perpetuate my covenant with you.

If you walk before me and be blameless, I will perpetuate my covenant. What's the flip side of that? If you do not walk before me, if you do not purify yourself, I will not perpetuate my covenant with you. I will cut off my covenant with you.

And the Scriptures are replete with examples of this taking place. God made a covenant with Saul as king of Israel similar to the one He makes with David. I would have given you a house and a name and a son on the throne of Israel, but you have not walked before me.

You have not been blameless. Samuel speaks for God and tells Saul. And Saul's line and Saul's rule is cut off.

Israel stands on the slopes of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim and hears the blessings and cursings. God says, If you are obedient and follow my word, I will bless you. If you depart and break the covenant, I will curse you.

Yet, there is a condition for the perpetuation of the covenant blessings. The Abrahamic covenant, and I am swimming against a huge tide of theology books here, virtually any systematic theology that you consult will say that the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant. Well, all I can do is look at what the Scripture says.

God says, Walk before me and be blameless. Keep yourself purified. And I will perpetuate my covenant with you.

And that is a condition. Those who do not walk before God, it doesn't matter who they are descended from, or whether they were circumcised on the eighth day, or anything else. If we do not walk before God, if we are not blameless, if we do not seek God's forgiveness and cleansing, God will not perpetuate his promised blessings.

And that's just a fact of Scripture. And this is a conditional covenant. And as we go through this chapter this morning, we're going to see God explain that in great detail.

I, frankly, will tell you I don't understand how the great weight and mass of theologians and theology have come down and decided that this is unconditional. It makes no sense to me except that there is a very strong Reformed tradition in most of the theology that is out there, even in the conservative church. And I think the emphasis on God's grace, God's compassion, and his sovereignty and so forth, all of which are true and all of which are wonderful, but in emphasizing those to such an extent, I think it has warped a little bit the ability to objectively interpret Scripture and recognize with all of those things human responsibility and that we stand or fall based on what we choose.

It is possible to deny the grace of God. It is not irresistible grace. It is resistible grace by God's decree.

God in his sovereignty made his own grace resistible. God has always reminded me, and I've said this before, but I think sometimes theologically people unconsciously sort of make God like King Midas. Remember the Midas touch? I forget how he arrived at this, but he had a wish or something.

He said, I wish everything I touched would turn to gold. They said, okay, fine. So then everything he touched turned to gold and he had no control over it.

When he went to go to bed, he touched his bed and it turned to gold and it was hard as a rock. When he reached out his hand to eat food, it turned to gold and he couldn't eat it.

Everything he touched literally turned to gold.

And it is as though God in his sovereignty can't allow any free will anywhere else. If he thinks something or if he says something, then it has to be that way and nobody can resist it. He's got sort of a spiritual Midas complex where if God thinks it, if God knows it ahead of time, then it has to happen that way and there can be no other possibility.

If he thinks a thought, that decrees it and it's raven in stone. It's turned to gold and nothing can change it. And that's not the case.

God is greater than that. That is a limited God. That's an enfeebled God that can't control his own sovereignty, that can't control his own thoughts.

That if he thinks something, it comes into being. God can think a lot of things that never happen. God thought to perpetuate Saul on the throne and then God changed his mind.

And Samuel said, God has changed his mind about you. It's an enfeebled God who once he makes up his mind, he can't change it. That's a limited God.

That's a small God. And in effect, that is a failure of human understanding to recognize how great God really is. Everybody likes to talk about God as the God of possibilities.

Well, it's really true. God can consider all the possibilities and God can leave things open to man's choice. God is so great.

It's a limited God that has to decree everything so that it won't run amok. It's like he has to map it all out and carve the grooves in stone ahead of time and then turn man loose on it and let him only follow those grooves because were he to do something different, God wouldn't be able to respond. God wouldn't be able to control history unless he decreed it all ahead of time.

God is far greater than that. God is so great that he can turn billions of free wills loose in the universe and still accomplish his plan. He can know ahead of time what they're going to do and what they're going to think and what they're going to choose and yet that knowledge doesn't decree it.

They are totally free agents. But he can accomplish his plan and turn everybody loose. It's an incredibly great God who can turn that many variables loose and still know the end from the beginning.

It's beyond our comprehension and that's why I think a lot of times we've tried to scale God down to something we can understand. Oh well, of course he can make his plan happen if he's decreed everything and nothing can change and nothing can happen except by his will. So, I don't know how this... That's my only guess as to why people have said that the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant.

Unconditional meaning God is going to fulfill it no matter what. It is fulfilled, but it is fulfilled because Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the faithful generations of Israel met the condition. That's why the covenant is fulfilled and God has been faithful and God has kept his promise to every faithful Israelite and by extension to every faithful descendant of Abraham.

Paul says we are children of Abraham by faith. We inherit the blessing of God when we, like Abraham, walk before God and grasp that blamelessness that he makes available to us. But there isn't any getting around it in my mind and if you choose to understand this differently, God bless you.

But it looks to me like it is conditional. He says walk before me and be blameless and I will... And one of the things that helps us is understanding the verb kum. I will perpetuate.

I will continue to bless you under the terms of this covenant. Walk before me and be blameless. I will perpetuate the covenant.

What do you think would have happened if Abraham had not obeyed God? If he had gone back down to Egypt and sold out and gotten himself a harem and had a bunch of kids down there in Egypt? Or if he had not been the man who took Isaac to the top of the mountain as we will soon see? He would not be the father of many nations. He would not be the figure in Israelite history that he became. In the same way that if David had followed the pattern of Saul, Jesus Christ would not be the son of David.

He would be the son of someone else. David, Abraham, they occupy those positions because they met the terms of the covenant. They walked before God.

The Bible says they walked before God. David is a man after God's own heart. Abraham is a friend of God.

They met the condition and that's why God was able to bless them. Can God maintain his integrity and unconditionally bless those who are perverse and who hate him and who disregard him and are apathetic toward him? Then there are other parts of his promises and his covenants that are going to be breached. God says, I will honor those who honor me and those who dishonor me I will lightly esteem, which is one of the world's biggest understatements.

He says that about the sons of Eli. They're priests. They're sons of a father functioning and leading the worship life in Israel.

But because they abuse that, can God bless them and say, well, but they're sons of Abraham and I told Abraham I would bless all of his descendants, so let's just go ahead and bless them even though they're hooking the three-pronged hook into the pot and yanking out the sacrifice and making a mockery of worship and so forth. You can see the

problem with the view of unconditionality, at least I can. So here we go.

I will confirm. I will perpetuate. I will sustain.

I will make good my covenant between me and you and will multiply you exceedingly when you walk before me and you're blameless. Now, just by way of review, because a lot hangs on this. The whole rest of this chapter depends on us understanding these first few verses and that's why we've slowed down and spent some time on them.

We've already seen God use this language with Noah in Genesis 6-18 and again in Genesis 9-11 after the flood with Abraham here in Genesis 17-7. We'll see it down here in verse 19 when Abraham says to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. Now, is Ishmael a progeny or an offspring of Abram? Is he one of his descendants? Part of his seed? Yes, he is.

So why cannot Ishmael live before God? Why can he not partake of the covenant? Well, God says, and this is amazing. I wish we could take time to look at all this in Hebrew. In verse 18, Abraham said to God, first thing he says after quite a bit of this, he says in verse 17, Shall a child be born to a man? He laughs and says this in his heart.

Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old and shall Sarah who is 90 years old bear a child? But then Abraham speaks and he says, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. You get the idea he considers this idea of a child with Sarah unlikely. He says, God, it would be so much easier to just use Ishmael.

Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. But what's that very last phrase there? Before you. In Hebrew, this is *lapan*, before the face of.

Same phrase we had up in verse 1. Walk before me. We know walk is a figurative way of saying live. Live your life before my face, literally.

Here, after the statement of the covenant and the potential, the wonderful blessings involved here as this covenant is perpetuated, Abraham speaks to God and he says, Oh, that Ishmael might live before your face. Might walk before your face. Oh, that Ishmael might partake of all these wonderful blessings.

It's very powerful in Hebrews 19. Then God said, no. And it's strong.

There ought to be a period after no. And as they like to say in seminary, you could preach on this quite a bit. You could make a whole sermon.

I could easily spend the rest of the lesson on God saying no. Here's Abraham. He's a wonderful man of faith.

God is making one of the greatest covenants of human history with him and promising him all kinds of blessings. He says, I'm your shield. I'm your reward.

I will bless you. I'm going to do all these wonderful things. And Abraham makes this request.

He says, oh, that Ishmael might live before your face. And God says, no. No.

Abraham, wonderful man of faith, one of the greatest men of history, makes a request to God. God says, no. Not going to do it.

Isn't going to happen. Big, fat, no. Why? Ishmael does not meet the condition.

And God's not going to make him. People who believe in the overruling sovereignty of God will say, now see there, God makes Abraham walk before him and he makes Isaac walk before him. He doesn't make Ishmael walk before him.

It's the inscrutable, unknowable ways of God. Well, if you want to wind that up and watch it go, that's fine. But here, God already has observed Ishmael.

Of course, he observed him in eternity past, but Ishmael is already 12 years old here. And Abraham knows that Ishmael does not walk before God. He knows that he doesn't have a heart for God.

That he's not blameless and that he's not interested in being blameless. That's why he makes the request. If Ishmael was a wonderful, faithful, spiritual seeker of God's face and God's truth and God's plan, why would Abraham even need to make the request? Oh, that he might walk before you.

But it pains Abraham to see his son taking after the ways of Egypt instead of the ways of God. I think Ishmael is a believer. I think he knows God is there.

I think he's probably trusted God and has recognized that he's a rewarder of those who seek him. But Ishmael just has no desire to seek Him. He says, well, he's like Esau will be a generation or two down the road.

He says, well, yes, God's there. Yes, Dad, you've told me about God. I recognize, I've seen His influence in your life.

I know He's there. That's great. That's fine.

But hey, I've got a life to live. I'm going to get all ticked off here because I'm not going to be the big heir and get all the riches and all the cattle and the flocks and the servants and stuff. Even though I'm the firstborn, I'm going to have a chip on my shoulder.

I'm just going to bug out. I'm going to go live by myself. And God said He would do that.

That's the way He's going to be. He's going to live apart. He's going to be by Himself.

His hand will be against every man and every man's hand will be against Him. He's going

to live the life of Cain who is also a believer. He's going to live the life of the fugitive and the vagabond, the one who wanders out on the fringes and the edges of civilization.

That's His choice. That's what He wants to do. And so Abraham says, oh Lord, I wish He would be on the inside.

I wish He could walk before you, could live before you. God says no. That's not the choice He's made and God is not going to overrule it, even for Abraham.

God's not going to get inside Ishmael's mind and tinker with it and make him one of the elect, so to speak. God says no. New sentence.

Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him. And guess what? That's again the verb kum.

I will confirm. I will perpetuate my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you.

I know that you love him, that you desire the best for him and that you have made an appeal to me on his behalf. God says, behold, I have blessed him. I will make him fruitful.

I will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes and I will make him a great nation. I will do as much for him as I can do.

I will bless him because he's associated with you, because you're his father and because you've made a request on his behalf. I will do as much as I can do. I will bless him in the world.

He will have many children. This is what's considered the greatest blessing in the ancient world, that you be the father of many sons. He's going to be the father of twelve princes.

Nations will come from him. He's going to be great. He's going to prosper in his own way.

But my covenant, in verse 21, I will confirm, my covenant I will perpetuate with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year. At this set time next year. What's God saying here? It's important.

How long will it be until the birth of Isaac? This same time next year. That's twelve months, right? What's the human gestation period? Nine months. Has Isaac been conceived yet? No, he has not.

It's very important. Then he, God, finished talking with him and God went up from Abraham. Verse 22.

So, here in Genesis 17, the language is confirmation of the existing covenant. The covenant that God has already established with Abraham, he's going to perpetuate. He's

going to perpetuate with Abraham.

He's going to perpetuate with Isaac. He is not going to perpetuate that covenant with Ishmael even though when God said I will bless you and your seed after you, that doesn't include Ishmael. And Ishmael is Abraham's seed.

Why? Is God contradicting himself? No, he's not. It is because Ishmael does not meet the condition. And we see this now in the part that we've skipped here in Genesis 17.

After he renames Abram, as we saw last time in verse 5, you will not be called Abram. Your name shall be Abraham. Probably all of us are familiar with the difference in those names.

Abraham means father of princes or father of kings. God says in verse 6, I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you and kings shall come from you. It's interesting that when one meets the condition of walking before God and being blameless, God says I will make you fruitful.

He says in verse 20 that he will make Ishmael fruitful. He will multiply him exceedingly. This is in the physical sense of many descendants.

He says the same thing about Abraham. So both of them are going to be fruitful. Abraham is going to be fruitful through Isaac.

Ishmael will be fruitful and be the father of 12 princes. There's fruit and there's fruit because the covenant blessings are going to fall on the line of Isaac. The covenant blessings are not going to fall on the line of Ishmael.

Both lines are fruitful. Both lines will generate nations and kings, but the blessing of God is only going to reside on the line of Isaac. Why? Because those are the ones that will meet the condition of the covenant.

Now obviously we know that not all of them do. Not all of them did. But those that do honor God, those that do seek God, that's where they're going to be found.

I believe that this is God's organization of history in the Old Testament for convenience, if you will, for ease of management and ease of provision. You think about the human soul. You can be born anywhere, any civilization, any generation.

If God randomly distributes those who He knows ahead of time, not because He causes it, but because He has knowledge of the end from the beginning, suppose that the soul that became Moses was born in the land of the Hurrians or the land of the Hittites or down in Egypt someplace or in some other civilization, it's going to be not impossible but difficult, sort of awkward, for God to find a way to nurture and nourish and provide the content of His Word, to bless, to incorporate that individual into the doings of God which

are on a national basis in the Old Testament. I think that God, just for the sake of convenience, at least from a human point of view, knowing ahead of time those that would choose for Him and knowing those that would not, planted the ones who would be positive. He doesn't make them positive.

He didn't say, well, I'm going to make a positive one now. But those that He knew ahead of time would, by their own free will, choose Him. He had to be born in Israel.

That's where provision is. That's where blessing is. God deals in a national way.

And there are exceptions to that. There are those like Naaman and Rahab and Ruth and others who came to God and were not a part of Israel, but they came to the nation. Naaman asks the prophet for an exception in his case.

He says, I serve my king and I really feel like I have a duty-bound obligation to continue. The prophet says, fine, go back and serve your king. You're not required to come to Israel to worship.

But he's an exception. The resources, the sustenance, the blessing, the spirit,