

The Covenant With Abraham

Genesis Study #3

Genesis 12:1-9 "Abram's Call"

Genesis 17:1-27 "Abram's Covenant"

On Barren Women

- Sara gave birth to Isaac (Gen 11:30/15:2/17:17 (Sarah is 90)/21:3)
- Rebecca gave birth to Jacob (Gen 25:21)
- Rachel gave birth to Joseph (Gen 29:31) Anna gave birth to Samuel (1 Sam 1:2)
- Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist
- Anna gave birth to Mary

Genesis 12:1-9

1. The Call of Abram

An absence of dialogue emphasizes the calling comes in the form of a command that Abram obeys. It also implied a change of identity and faith.

a.) The Obedience of Abram

"He obeyed it without meddlesome curiosity and was in fact perfectly assured that God's promises were unfailing." (Chrysostom, p. 245)

"You see, whenever a soul is alert and vigilant, it cuts through all obstacles and becomes completely the possession of the loved one; it is not upset by any apparent difficulties in its path, but passes them all by, not stopping until it gains the object of its feverish search." (Chrysostom, 248)

b.) The Detachment of Abram (country, father's house, kindred)

c.) The Mission of Abram

"In Him" all the nations shall be blessed.

2. The Triple Promise to Abram

This promise is renewed with each Patriarch - Isaac & Jacob

Descendants (12:2,7) - The eventual Christians of the World today are considered spiritual descendants of Abram by faith.

Relationship- (17:10) - is established through the circumcision fulfilled in Baptism

The Promised Land - (12:7) - a dwelling place fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.

"We, on the other hand, are not called to leave one country for another, but to leave earth for heaven; we don't display the same enthusiasm about obeying, but rather

propose in many cases trifling excuses, nothing being sufficient to win us over -neither the magnitude of the promises . . . nor the dignity of Him who invites us." (Chrysostom, p. 252)

3. The "Blessing of the Righteous"

"And I will bless those who bless you" (Gen 12:3)

a.) At the conclusion of the divine liturgy in the Orthodox Church, the priest call out these very words... "Lord, bless those who praise you and sanctify those who place their trust in you, save your people and bless your inheritance."

4. God appears to Abram - a "theophany"

". . . showing consideratness for our human nature, reveals himself to those who worthily prepare themselves in advance . . . I appeared in a way suited for each one . . . How does He appear? In a way God alone knows, and in a way that it was possible for Abram to see Him. . ." (Chrysostom, p. 256-7)

a.) Human response to the divine has always been one of offering and sacrifice.

"See the indication of his god-fearing attitude: the very spot where he had been accorded converse with God he consecrated and gave evidence of thanksgiving as far as he could." (Chrysostom, p. 259)

b.) Worship of God is the highest form of thanksgiving.

"See in Paul's words: 'In every place raising your hands in prayer' (1 Tim. 2:8) being put into practice by the patriarch ahead of time in building an altar in every place and offering thanksgiving to the Lord. He knew well that the God of all looks for nothing more from the human race . . . than a grateful attitude and knowing how to render thanks in his favor." (Chrysostom p. 260)

On Divine Providence "Famine in the Land" (Gen 12:10)

". . . the earth indeed can suffer famine and those who mind earthly things (Phil. 3:19) But they can never be oppressed by the fasting of famine it is that bread that "they should do the will of the Father who is in heaven" (Matt 7:21) and whose soul that "bread which comes down from heaven nourishes . . . the divine scripture carefully does not say that those were held by famine who it knew possessed knowledge of God and to whom the food of heavenly wisdom was offered." (Origin, p. 217)

Genesis: 13

- Abram returns from Egypt to the sight of his first altar.
- Abram splits from his nephew Lot in a peaceful manner. (Eph 4:1)
- The Altar at Heron venerated by early Christians as the sight where the three angels appeared to Abraham (13:18)

Genesis: 14

- Lot taken captive and saved by Abram to prove his virtue.

Melchizedek (Gen 14:18) = king of righteousness (Heb, 7:2)

a.) A Type of Christ

"So in fact, he had either been accorded the honor by his peers on account of his preeminence in age, or he had simply acted as a priest, like Noah, Abel and Abram. In a particular manner he was to prove a type of Christ. Hence, Paul too understands him in this role in the words, 'With no father, with no mother, with no family history, lacking beginning of days and end of life, he yet resembles the Son of God and remains a priest forever (Heb. 7:3_ Chrysostom, p. 315)

b.) Melchizedek brings bread and wine (prefiguring the Eucharist)

c.) The Eternal Priesthood of Christ

- Christ was not anointed with oil - neither was Mel.
- Christ offers his blood - Mel offers bread and wine
- Mel was a priest of all nations - as is Christ
- Abram was blessed by the offering as we are by the offering of Christ's blood.

d.) Abram makes the first tithe in the Bible

"Abram teaches the need to demonstrate great generosity and offer up the first fruits of what has been provided us by God." (Chrysostom p. 317)

Genesis: 15

1 Descendants to Abram promised God established himself as the "Shield" of Abram
(Gen 15:1)

Genesis: 16

Hagar & Sara are symbols of the Old and New Covenants :(see Gal 4:22-31)

Genesis 17:1-27

1. The "Covenant"

"The Hebrew word is more appropriately translated 'obligation, promise'. Here, this obligation is taken up one-sidedly by one party (God) toward another (Abram) . . . God binds himself; Abram remains the silent recipient of the promise." (Von Rad)

a.) The "Covenant" resembles a marriage:

An identical promise is made by God during the Wedding Ceremony in the Orthodox Church. God is pledging Himself to the couple through the placing of the rings upon the couple.

b.) Multiple Nations shall results from the Covenant

Rom 4:13-17 understands the Christian multitude as the many nations.

"The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of

the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants -- not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations" -- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."

c.) The Virgin Mary is a descendant of Abraham.

The eternal covenant is established in Christ who was born of the lineage of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

2. The Covenant of Circumcision

a.) The early Church understood this to be fulfilled in Baptism

"You have been circumcised in Him with a circumcision not the work of human hands, but putting off the sins of the flesh, with the \circumcision of Christ . . .buried with Him in baptism." (Col. 2:11)

"For he is not a "visible" Jew who is one outwardly, nor is "visible" circumcision of the flesh, but a cryptic Jew is circumcised in the Spirit not the Letter." (Rom 2:28-29)

"For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." (Gal 6:15)

"Now, this was a figure of Baptism, for just as circumcision cuts off from the body a part which is not useful . . .so by holy Baptism are we circumcised of sin." (St. John Damaskos, p. 398)

b.) On the 8th Day The Orthodox Church proclaims the 8th Day to mean eternal life.

"The reference to the eighth day as "portraying the eternal life of the age to come" is repeated in several different ways in the hymns of the Feast. (Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, on Jan 1st the eighth day of his birth) This comes from the Jewish and early Christian teaching that the Day of the Lord, which is the Day of God's Kingdom, is beyond the time of this world which is measured in weeks of seven days. . . The fact that circumcision and naming took place on this day is therefor a symbol of eternal life. It is for this reason that most of the Church's major Festivals are celebrated for a period of eight days." (Fr. Hopko, *The Winter Pascha*, p. 140)

- Christ submits himself to fulfill the law of Moses in Himself (Luke 2:21)
- Christ comes as a servant and identifies himself with our sinfulness
- Christ delivers us from the Law which cannot be fulfilled - by faith we are made righteous.

"Circumcision has ceased, For Christ was circumcised of His own will, Granting the nations remission of sins, And saving them by grace. The eighth Day, The day on which Christ the Master was circumcised in the flesh, Portrays the eternal life of the age to come" (Matins, "Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, Jan. 1)