

## **“God’s Promise Is No Laughing Matter”**

### *Genesis 17*

Most of us have probably received a phone call or letter or email telling us about a “great offer” that just sounded “too good to be true”. God’s promises to Abram were amazing far reaching promises, and yet Abram believed him enough to take God up on it by leaving behind his “country...relatives and... father’s household” to go to the land God would show him (Gen. 12<sup>1-5</sup>). Since that time a lot of years have passed, years and years of waiting for God’s solution to a very pressing problem that only seems to grow more impossible with each passing day. Abram & Sarai’s biological clocks ran out long ago, and it’s laughable to think otherwise...or is it?

### **Opening Question(s)** – Choose one

- Who always helps you to have a good laugh? How?
- What is the most serious contract you ever signed? How did you confirm it?

### **Study Questions**

- 1) **Read Genesis 17.** How long has Abram been living in the promised land (see 12<sup>4</sup>) and how long has it been since Ishmael was born (see 16<sup>16</sup>)? How do you think Abram might have been feeling about the promises made to him so long ago (see vv.17-18)?
- 2) In 17:1-8 “God Almighty” appears to Abram and, ironically, changes his name from Abram (“exalted father”) to Abraham (“father of many”). What covenant promises does the Lord restate, and raise the stakes of, in these verses?
- 3) Having “cut” a covenant with Abram 12+ years ago (Gen. 15<sup>9-21</sup>), God now confirms it. What instruction does God give Abraham as an outward sign of the covenant (vv.9-14)?
- 4) Why do you think God chose circumcision to confirm his covenant with Abram?<sup>1</sup> What does circumcision demonstrate (cf. Deut. 30<sup>6</sup>; Jer. 4<sup>4</sup>; Rom. 2<sup>29</sup>; Col. 2<sup>11-14</sup>)?
- 5) Is this “everlasting covenant” (v.17) like a coupon good for redemption by anyone, anytime, anywhere? Or are there conditions or limitations attached to it?
- 6) In 17:15-16 what specific promise does God make about Sarai, now to be called *Sarah* (“princess”)? How does Abraham respond initially (vv.17-18)? Eventually (vv.23-27)? Why?
- 7) In verses 19-22, how does God answer Abraham about his future and the future of Isaac and Ishmael?
- 8) What have you learned about God in this chapter to help you believe his promises in spite of your circumstances?

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<sup>1</sup> Notice that in Genesis 15 God obligates Himself through a cutting ritual, while in this episode, Abraham and his household undergo the cutting ritual of circumcision.