

Lent 2



March 16, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Eternal God, it is your glory always to have mercy. Bring back all who have erred and strayed from your ways; lead them again to embrace in faith the truth of your Word and to hold it fast; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-26

{1} 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} And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." {3} Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, {4} "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. {5} No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. {6} I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. {7} 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.... {15} God said to Abraham, "As for Sarah your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. {16} I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Chapter 17 belongs to the Priestly document (P). The omitted verses, 8-14, concern the grant of the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants, and circumcision as the sign of the covenant.

1. Abram was ninety-nine years old: Abram was 75 years old when he received his call and left Haran (Genesis 12:4). He was ten years older when he took Sarai's maid, Hagar, as a wife (16:3); eighty-six when Ishmael was born (16:16); 100 when Isaac was born (21:5). Sarah was one hundred and twenty-seven years old when she died (23:1); by calculation Abraham would have been one hundred and thirty-seven (compare their ages in 17:17). Abraham was one hundred and forty when Isaac married Rebecca (25:20, by calculation), and one hundred and seventy-five when he died (25:7). Only P provides a chronology for Abraham's story.

God Almighty: 'el shaddai [El Shaddai]. According to Exodus 6:3 the name Yahweh was not used until the time of Moses. El Shaddai was the name that was used by the patriarchs. El Shaddai occurs frequently in the stories of Abraham and his descendants. "In the theology of our source, God's revelation as *'el shaddai* designates a definite and, moreover, temporary stage of God's revelation to the patriarchs (Ex. 6.3, 'By my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them')." [1]

walk before me and be blameless: Abraham is invited to come into Yahweh's presence; he is to be totally committed to the covenant that is about to be concluded between Yahweh and Abraham.

2. I will make my covenant between me and you: Literally, "I will give my covenant." "...a solemn, binding assurance which can correspond to an oath, and whose content can be the same as a promise (as in Gen. 15)." [2] The covenant with Abraham is a covenant in which God obligates himself to certain things, but there are no obligations laid on Abraham. This is very significant in contrast to the Sinai covenant in which Yahweh determines to be the

God of Israel, if they keep his commandments. The covenant is "an everlasting covenant," that includes Abraham's descendants (verse 7).

I...will make you exceedingly numerous: See verses 4, 5, 6 for a repetition of this promise. It reflects the promise made at the time of Abram's call (Genesis 12:2; also Genesis 15:5 (E?).

5, 15: Abram's name is changed to Abraham, which is explained on the ground that Yahweh has made Abraham "the ancestor of a multitude of nations." Sarai's name is changed to Sarah (verse 15). In fact, these are the same names in different forms, probably different dialects. They are used by the P editor to mark a significant change in Abraham and Sarah's lives.

16. *I will give you a son by her:* Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90. In verse 17 Abraham laughs at the idea that at their age they could have a child. The promise of a son is repeated in 18:10 by Yahweh in the appearance of three men (18:1), and Sarah laughs (18:12-15). When the child was born Abraham named him Isaac, "He laughs" (21:4, 6).

Psalm 22:23-31

{23} You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! {24} For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. {25} From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. {26} The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! {27} All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. {28} For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. {29} To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. {30} Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, {31} and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

The Psalm begins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Verses 1-21 recite the distress of the psalmist who feels abandoned by Yahweh. In verse 21 an oracle answering the singer's cry for help is announced, "From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me." A song of thanksgiving and praise begins with verse 22.

23. *All you offspring of Jacob...of Israel:* Jacob is the grandson of Abraham; his offspring are descendants of Abraham. Israel is the name God gave Jacob at the ford of the Jabbok river (Genesis 32:28). Abraham's descendants are called on to praise Yahweh for his intervention.

25. *you:* Yahweh is the source and even the content of the singers praise.

my vows: This is not a *quid pro quo* for Yahweh's favor, but an expression of the singer's desire to praise God for his deliverance.

26: "We should probably assume that the song of praise and thanksgiving of vv. 22-31 was intoned at a meal for the poor in connection with an offering.... The [*nwim*] ["poor"], among whom the petitioner of our psalm counts himself (v. 24a), are to eat and be satisfied. But this wish, according to v. 26b, has an ultimate meaning: the poor may experience the full life of nearness to God for all times!" [3]

27-31. *the ends of the earth...all the families of the nations...:* Not only those of the chosen people, but all people shall worship the creator and ruler of the world.

all who sleep in the earth: This goes beyond the thought in Psalms 6:5; 88:10-12, that the dead do not praise Yahweh. The boundary between world has been broken down, and even the dead now praise God.

30. *posterity...future generations...a people yet unborn:* The singer's descendants will serve Yahweh and keep alive his rescue by telling of it to coming generations. So, both the dead and the not yet born are witnesses to the power and protection of Yahweh.

Romans 4:13-25

{13} For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. {14} If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. {15} For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. {16} For this reason 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 all of us, {17} 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. {18} Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." {19} He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. {20} No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, {21} being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. {22} Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." {23} Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, {24} but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, {25} who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

"The contrast which Paul makes between the covenant of law made on Sinai, and the covenant of promise made to Abraham is not without its antecedents in the Old Testament.... a very real contrast can be discerned between the Deuteronomic interpretation of Israel's covenant basis, which placed all emphasis upon the covenant of Horeb-Sinai, and the Priestly interpretation which gave primacy to the covenant with Abraham.... It is clear that Paul was not the first to see a theological contrast, and that he was building upon earlier attempts to resolve the tension between law and grace which had emerged in Judaism. The Abrahamic covenant stood as a witness to the primacy of grace in all God's dealings with his people Israel, and testified to the belief that election was an act of God, and not a state to which men could attain by their obedience to a law." [4]

Paul is not arguing here that "the adherents of the law," the Jews, are somehow excluded from a relationship with God. Rather he includes all humankind in such a relationship based not on Abraham's obedience to covenant stipulations, "the law," but on God's unilateral promise of everlasting grace. "The law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise" (Galatians 3:17). This is Paul's working out of the covenants of Abraham and Sinai. Abraham has priority and the requirements of Sinai cannot alter its provisions. In Galatians Paul brings Sinai into context with Abraham through Hagar, who represents "the present Jerusalem" (Galatians 4:25). For Paul the contrast between the two covenant traditions is resolved in favor of the unilateral covenant of Abraham, Noah and David.

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus is twice addressed as "Son of David," by a blind man seeking healing (Mark 10:47-48), and Jesus disputes the teaching of the scribes that the Messiah is the Son of David (Mark 12:35-37). Jesus' interpretation is that the Messiah is greater than David. Paul knows that Jesus is Son of David according to human descent (Romans 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:8). David refers to "the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works" (Romans 4:6, referring to Psalm 31:1-2), and to the blindness of those who will not see that election is by grace (Romans 11:5-10, referring to Psalm 69:22-23).

That Jesus is the anti-type of Moses is presupposed in the Gospel of Mark. [5] Moses is mentioned 8 times in Mark. Twice his teaching is described favorably (Mark 1:44; 7:10), once, with respect to Moses' liberal divorce law, unfavorably (Mark 10:3-4). Two of the references are in the Transfiguration story, where a part of the significance may be to present Jesus as the fulfillment of both Moses' and Elijah's heritage (Mark 9:4-5). And the last two references are in connection with a dispute with the Sadducees over resurrection

(Mark 12:19, 26).). For Paul Moses is "a type of the office-bearer of the old covenant.... With him is contrasted the NT office-bearer...." [6]

24-25: Our relationship is not dependent on our righteousness. That is left in God's hands. Jesus "was handed over to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification." This is the content of the Gospel for Paul.

Mark 8:31-38

{31} Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. {32} He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. {33} But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." {34} He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. {35} For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. {36} For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? {37} Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? {38} Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

31-32a: The first prophecy of the Passion.

32b-33: Peter rebuked Jesus and is rebuked in return. Luke omits Peter's rebuke and Matthew puts it into rather appealing words.

Satan: For Satan see the notes on the Gospel for last Sunday. Peter is not being identified with an opponent of God, but rather as a part of the ongoing testing that Jesus faced.

34-37: Just as Jesus denies himself human satisfaction and accepts the cross, so those who would be his followers must do the same. Paul quotes an early Christian hymn that celebrates Christ Jesus who emptied himself and became obedient to death on the cross, and he calls on the saints in Philippi to be of the same mind (Philippians 2:1-12).

35. those who want to save their life...will save it: Like the proverb, "the first will be last and the last first," human values are inverted. To save our earthly life will lose our eternal life. They are mutually exclusive.

38. Those who are ashamed of me...of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed: Son of man, *bar nasha* in Aramaic, can be a circumlocution for "I;" "To be ashamed of a person is to dissociate oneself from that person's honor rating. When the Son of man comes with power, he will separate himself from 'this generation.'" [7]

Reflection

While the covenant at Sinai is the great nation-creating act of Yahweh in the Old Testament, Paul argues that it is Yahweh's covenant with Abraham that is constitutive of the people of God, both Israelites and non-Israelites. Because that relationship has already been guaranteed by God's covenant of grace, Jesus was sent to die for our trespasses. When Jesus told his disciples what was about to happen Peter objected, and was rebuked in turn for his focus on human standards of conduct.

Jesus called on his disciples to "deny themselves," to follow him, because, he said, those who seek to save their lives will lose them. Human standards cannot be applied to God's business. He saves us, not because of our righteous deeds, but because of his own decision. The promise God makes does not depend on our obedience to the law. Our salvation is a pure gift from God unqualified by our desires or actions. If, like Abraham, we put our trust exclusively in God then we will be justified. However, like a drink of water given to a thirsty person, we will benefit from that salvation only if we accept it; when we accept it we are no longer in danger of death, and we will be changed.

Hymns [8]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement 1991* (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).
E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

377 --E--Lift High the
455 --D--"Come, Follow Me,"
398 --D--"Take Up Your
Cross"

504 --II--O God, My Faithful
810s --G--Weary of All
487, 406, 384, 453

Prayers of the People [9]

A: With profound wisdom, Jesus recognized the cost of redemption for himself and those who would come after him. Although a friend of Jesus, Peter missed the point and collaborated with the Father of Lies. So, we pray, "Creator God, let your wisdom be within us," and respond, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the church at risk in the world.

P: Save us from an easy assessment of the Christian way. Help us die to self and evidence gospel integrity. Lift high the cross among us. God of all, let your wisdom be within us. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for governments and the environment.

P: Enable all nations to strive for honest appraisals and sacrificial actions that will preserve what you have made. God of heaven and earth, let your wisdom be within us. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the desperate among us.

P: May your church be alert to the struggles of those who would choose death over life. Help us to share clues of meaning from our gospel. Permit us to embrace the troubled ones with concern and true caring. God who consoles, let your wisdom be within us. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for those under instruction in our church.

P: Take away notions of cheap grace. Like Abraham and Sarah, let faith in your promises strengthen daily living and draw their hopes to a resurrection tomorrow. Let their lives proclaim that you are true to your word. God forever, let your wisdom be within us. C: Amen.

P: As those who totter between commitment and failure, between strength and weakness, let your Spirit empower our days. C: Amen.

Or[10]

Presider or deacon

As we prepare for the paschal feast, let us offer intercessions to God who gave up his Son for us.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering, for all Christians enduring persecution and tested by suffering, and for all the holy people of God.

For NN our catechumen(s) and NN their sponsors.

For the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, for all who share God's covenant, and for all the peoples of the earth.

For all who are oppressed, afflicted, or in despair.

For the dying and the dead, and for those who mourn.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Presider

Blessed are you, God of our ancestors, who sent your Son to suffer greatly and after three days rise from the dead. Receive the prayers we offer this day and enable us to take up our cross and follow Jesus Christ. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

- [1] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1961, p. 193.
- [2] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, 1985, p. 259.
- [3] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, pp. 299f.
- [4] R.E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis XV and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition*. London: SCM Press, 1967, pp. 87f.
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 867.
- [6] Joachim Jeremias, ["Moses"], *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel (ed.), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Vol. IV, 1967, p. 869.
- [7] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 232.
- [8] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>
- [9] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b1.txt
- [10] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>