

Genesis, pt2: Covenant, part 3 – Call to Follow

Genesis 16-19

MPS God calls people to follow Him by faith in His salvation covenant and declare the glorious praise of His Name.

OBJ Every person can understand to follow God's covenant by five distinctives.

INTRO The last two weeks we have considered God's covenant, first its promise and then its sacrifice to secure it. Today we consider God's call to follow. **Do you know what God has called you to? Do you know what that call means?**

READ Genesis 16:1-6

*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. ²And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. ⁴And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" ⁶But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. **Genesis 16:1-6***

Sarah conceives an idea to fulfill God's promise and told Abraham what to do. (Pun intended.) This was an acceptable means of obtaining children in the custom of that day, but it was never acceptable in God's eyes. Abraham listened to his wife. So, at Sarah's direction he conceives a child with Hagar. And when Sarah saw that Hagar conceived, she looked on her with contempt. Then, she blamed Abraham for what he had done. Finally, Abraham blamed Sarah and chose the worst possible response, passivism toward the whole situation.

Is it just me, or does this whole situation sound and feel eerily familiar, "hauntingly" one might say?

ILLUS I distinctly remember the first time I got in real trouble with Christin. We were in college, not married, and when I saw her that morning she was noticeably upset with me. When I asked what was wrong, she told me the stupid thing I did to her the night before...in her dream. Men, I warn you. You will gain no ground with your wife by this common experience. It is in your best interest to believe that your experience is "unique". And, you are still guilty in her mind! THIS, friends, is how the world works.

I know we live in a completely different day, time, and culture, but this seems to me to be so obvious that everyone would have seen this head-on collision coming miles away. There are so many familiar sounds and feelings in this, it hurts! **But the familiarity is not with our current culture, but in our human condition.**

This account between Abraham and Sarah mirrors Genesis 3; Abraham was passive and listened to Sarah over God. Sarah allowed her worry to overrun her patience and she took action instead of obeying and waiting. We are ready to trust God in an instant but struggle in times of waiting. Sin and Satan's tactics are not new, but they are incredibly effective. **We must diligently guard against sin's constant influence in the passing of time, to subvert God's plan with our own or to simply grow lukewarm and passive toward God's promise.**

WHY do I begin with this today? God has given His covenant to Abraham, both in its promise and sacrifice. But the full measure of understanding has not yet been delivered. **God reveals that while He is the One who establishes covenant by His own character and nature, by His righteousness, He calls people to believe and trust to follow Him.**

TRANS As we work through these chapters we will see...

God calls people to follow Him by faith in His salvation covenant and declare the glorious praise of His Name.



An angel of the Lord visits Hagar to tell her that the Lord cares for her.(.7-16) He makes a promise to her, that He sees and knows her situation. She gives birth to a son and Abraham names him Ishmael. Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born. [Hagar reminds us that no one is beyond the sight of the Lord. He cares for the abused and responds when they call to Him.](#)

Genesis 17 begins with the Lord calling to Abraham, four years later. [READ Genesis 17:1-8](#)

*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, ²that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." ³Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷And 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. ⁸And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and ***I will be their God.***" **Genesis 17:1-8***

God calls Abraham to holiness, to covenant faithfulness. He reminds him of His promise and changes His name to mark him. He expands Abraham's understanding of the covenant, *between me and you and your offspring*(.7), by establishing the first of three key aspects of covenant; "*I will be their God*"(.8). God establishes the first key aspect of His covenant by commanding Abraham to walk blamelessly before Him because, He is "*their God*". [God, by the power of His command, is the reason we can and the One with whom we walk blamelessly.](#)

God next commands faithfulness to His Covenant by His people.(17:9-14) He establishes circumcision as the sign of the covenant. Circumcision as a sign served to identify them as God's people, and to demonstrate their commitment to one another as God's people. What is done in the flesh will represent what is eternal.(.13) [God establishes that the second key aspect of His covenant will be to distinguish the people as His, "You will be my people".](#)

Abraham is overwhelmed by the promise but remains concerned for Ishmael.(17:15-27) God assures Abraham that He will take care of Ishmael but that His covenant will come through Isaac, who will be born next year.(.21) Abraham begins his obedience immediately by circumcising Ishmael and his whole household.

Genesis 18 begins with three men visiting Abraham. Abraham recognizes that they are from the Lord. They announce that Sarah will have a son. Sarah hears this and laughs, asking her own question.(.12) Sarah's question is not like Abraham's though, demonstrating her lack of belief in God's promise. When the Lord asks about it, Sarah denies that she laughed because she was afraid. [It never helps when we try to hide from the Lord. He knows our fears and unbelief and wants us to be honest with Him as an act of faith in Him.](#)

The men leave and Abraham escorts them out. They tell Abraham the Lord's plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham, greatly concerned for Lot and his family, intercedes for them. He asks the Lord to spare those Lot and his family. This reminds me of Watchman Nee's quote on the relationship between intercessory prayer and the Lord's Will. He begins, "The will of God is governed by the prayers of man.", and continues, "the will of God is always in search of a way out. The Lord is always apprehending someone or some people to be the expression of His will. If many will rise up to do his work, He will do many things because of their prayers."¹ [Abraham intercedes and demonstrates God's will and desire to save.](#)

Genesis 19 tells of two angels that go down to warn Lot. Lot welcomes them in his home. The men of the city demonstrate the extent of their wickedness by demanding the guests entertain their pleasures. Lot, in a moment of extremely poor decision, exposes his daughters to great evil. But wickedness demands its own pleasure. And the incessant appetite of sin is a wearying slave master that is purely destructive to people. The angels rescue Lot by pulling him inside.

¹ Watchman Nee. Let Us Pray. (New York, Christian Fellowship publishers, 1977), p32, 40.



They tell Lot the city will be destroyed and to get out. Lot tells his family but they do not believe him. Men / husbands / dads, you cannot live lukewarm toward God in your life and leading your family, mostly based on what you learned in the past, and expect that when crises or hard times arise they will automatically follow you in what seems such an extreme measure. [Your influence on your family is set by the regular and consistent pattern you provide in following the Lord at all times.](#)

Lot hesitated to leave because he couldn't get his family to come. At dawn the angels warned him to get out now and not look back. By the demanding tug of the angels, Lot, his wife and two daughters escaped. Lot inquires on where he is able to run and take his family, never satisfied simply to say, "Yes" and obey, but always demanding one more selfish request. The Lord rains down sulfur and fire and destroys Sodom and Gomorrah and all the inhabitants. (.23-24) As they flee, Lot's wife looks back in disobedience and turns to a pillar of salt. (.26) Abraham walks out early the next morning and looks to see Sodom and Gomorrah burning. "*When the wicked increase, transgression increases, but the righteous will look upon their downfall.*" [Prov29:16 A most hopeful phrase concludes this story, "God remembered"\(.29\), and reminds us that God does use His people; God remembered Abraham and saved Lot.](#)

The Scriptures show once again how sin pervades deeply to continue its influence to thwart God's plan.(19:30-38) Lot's daughters fear having lost their husbands. They devise a plan to get their father drunk and conceive by him. Both daughters become pregnant by him and give birth to two sons. One becomes the father of the Moabites and the other the father of the Ammonites. These two sons become the fathers of two nations, who will later be the greatest antagonists against God's people. [Beware and do not believe its lie; your sin never only affects you and you cannot control its pervasiveness or extent in how it condemns and destroys others.](#)

These verses make us ask: "what happened to Lot?" Here again we see a stark contrast between Abraham vs Lot, what it means to follow the Lord and what becomes of one who is passive toward the things of God. Lot's passivity toward God reached its end, and found himself in a bottomless-pit cesspool of wickedness that spiraled out of control. Lot held a familiarity with the Lord, but he did not make the Lord a priority. His lack of priority left his family vulnerable and exposed. And since his passivity led him to a place of great sin and wickedness, when his family was exposed by his spiritual passivity, they became consumed by the culture around them. They were moral people, but not discerning or wise in godliness. They were good people, but not interested in being bothered by prioritizing godliness as a way of life. And as long as everything was okay, they were fine. But when God's judgment fell on wickedness, they didn't buy it because they had not been trained to believe the Lord. [Lot failed to lead his family to walk in obedience by faith to the Lord, so when hard times struck they needed proof instead of faith. As a result, they chose what was familiar, the world's ways; the values, ideas, ways of thinking, and practices that shaped their life became the cause that destroyed their life.](#)

BEWARE the sinful acceptableness of passivity in your life, and especially men / husbands / fathers. The gestation period may be long, but it always births unbelief when most needed. And the way you lead your wife, raise your children, or influence your friends will be the way they run when trouble comes, no matter how hard you warn them. [Passivity's morality is most deceiving by the acceptable, hollow shell under which it cloaks its unbelief, comforting one by its close form of godliness but knowing nothing of His true power.](#)

Trusting in the Lord, growing in godliness, leading your family in the ways of the Lord will NEVER be accomplished without intentionality and regular practice of following Him. NO sermon will convince your family or children to run to God when burning sulfur falls. What you allow to be placed on the "back burner" of priority now will be too late for your family and loved ones when you recognize it and they will be consumed by passivity's lack of intentionality or priority. [Living in God's covenant by looking to Jesus daily is the only way one learns to run to Him in hard times.](#)

[God calls people to follow Him by faith in His salvation covenant and declare the glorious praise of His Name.](#)

OBJ Five Distinctives of following God by His Covenant



1. God is the Covenant-maker (with man), -defender (against sin), and keeper (faithful to His Word).

God forms His covenant by three Key aspects: I will be their God.(17.7-8); You will be my people.(17.9-14); and later established, I will dwell among you. God establishes His covenant on the trueness of His character. He establishes it with Abraham and his descendants, of which we later learn are those who by faith believe in Jesus.(Gal2:16) God also establishes Himself as the defender of His covenant. He does not allow man's ways to determine His covenant because He is also the covenant-keeper. [God establishes, defends and fulfills His covenant by His sovereign will.](#)

TRANS Just as God establishes His covenant, so He determines who enters and enjoys the blessings of His covenant.

2. God calls people to believe and walk by faith in obedience to Him.

God gives His covenant as a revelation of His glory. It is not a trinket for people to do with as we will, but as He wills. God calls people to live by faith and walk in obedience to Him NOT because it makes sense to us, but because He is worthy of our faith and obedience. God's worthiness of all glory forms the defining rationale for why He calls people to trust Him, because He is able![Rom4:18](#) This is why Jesus commands in the Great Commission, "*teaching them to obey my commands.*"[Matt28:19](#) He is saying, "I just conquered Satan, sin, death, hell and the grave. I am worthy of all your obedience." [When God calls to live in faithfulness to Him, it is never 'because of' or 'sourced from' our ability but always from the power, strength and might of His glory!](#)

3. God marks His people as His own by Holy Spirit.

God gives Abraham the sign of circumcision to mark them as His people. This is a sign to the people that they are God's, but also serves to mark them as God's people among all nations. God wants people to know who He is, and His primary means of accomplishing His mission is by a distinct people who live "marked" by His power and glory to point others to Him.

Today God's people are "marked" by Holy Spirit. When we put our faith in Jesus, He puts His Holy Spirit in us. God circumcises the heart by Christ to enable us to love Him with our whole being.[Deut30:6;Phil3:3;Col2:11-12](#) Holy Spirit circumcises the heart[Rom2:29](#) and seals us as His guarantee of our inheritance in Him.[Eph1:13-14](#) Baptism becomes our public identification with Christ in His death and resurrection[Rom6:3-4](#), but Holy Spirit marks us as God's. [The way we live and walk distinct to Jesus by the Spirit forms our testimony to all the peoples of the world of the glory and praise of Jesus' Name.](#)

4. God watches over His people, but He judges sin and wickedness.

"for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." **Psalm 1:6**

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." **1 Peter 3:12**

Abraham and Sarah are far from perfect, and God calls them to faithfulness. But He is not surprised by their imperfection. Lot reaped the reward of his passivity and heaped its curse upon the head of his children and many others for many generations to come. God's blessing comes through repentance and forgiveness. Sin's misery and suffering arrives quietly but stings continually by passivity, lukewarm-ness or casualty toward God. God will not tolerate sin and wickedness forever, but He will ensure that His people will not get touched by sin's final blow. You either live under the "smile of God", as we remind you each week at the close of the service, or you suffer under the condemnation and death of your sin.

5. God leads His people to declare the glorious praise of His Name on the earth.

Repeatedly we see God use Abraham to accomplish His will and declare His glory and praise in the world. God uses the prayers of Abraham to unleash His will in the world, for Ishmael[17:18](#), and for Lot[18:22f](#). God shows a close association for HOW His will works in the world by WHO He disperses it through. To live in God's covenant, salvation, makes one a covenant-agent. Or, another way we often say it is, "to be saved means you live sent". "Saved and sent" are inseparably linked. [God leads ALL His people to serve His mission in the world of multiplying the glory and praise of His Great Name.](#)

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