

# Second Sunday in Lent

## A Son Proves God Faithful

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

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. 2And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3Then 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. 5No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7I 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. 15God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16I 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."

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## DIAGNOSIS: A Son Proves God Faithful?

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *The Hope of Generations*

One has to marvel that the promise of future generations was received by Abram as a gift! After all, the man was ninety-nine-

years old, and had to have lost all hope of any such legacy. So God's promise of a son was truly gift; Abram had stopped expecting it, and God just had given it (late, albeit, but still) generously. So hope that had dried up, was refreshed by God's promise.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Trust in Flesh***

But you know how this relationship has gone so far: Abram figured that maybe he should speed along God's promise; and when Sarai couldn't produce the promised child, he sought out Hagar. Let's give this promise some flesh, he must have thought to himself. Surely God wouldn't object when Abram wanted to help out. But wait—who was fulfilling the promise? Here God had clearly stated that God would be the one to establish his covenant with Abram, and Abram had taken over the plan. So who was Abram trusting after all?

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Blameless Walking?***

Such self-trust hardly could have qualified as walking before God blameless (v. 1). Before God, Abram's attempt at expediting the promised child was presumptuous. Worse, it was faithless. Abram was trusting that the promised child would prove God faithful; but it was a faithful God whom Abram needed to trust, not the birth of his son. Trust in anything other than God can only lead to death. (So Abram learned in later days when, as "Abraham," he is compelled to choose between trusting God or trusting the evidence of God's faithfulness—Isaac.)

## **PROGNOSIS: A Son Proves God Faithful!**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Blameless Child***

But what if the Giver and the Gift need not be separated? What if the Son promised, and delivered (in birth and to death) is both God and God's Promise? For that is what God accomplishes in his Son Jesus. God not only promises a Son and gives him to the world, but this Son comes as promise-fulfilled and Promiser.

Jesus embodies God's blessing—in fact, he is later acknowledged (in Matthew's genealogy) as a descendent of one of the kings promised in the Abrahamic covenant (v. 6). But there's more: After Jesus' resurrection he is acknowledged as the King in whom this covenant culminates. In his life, and even in the face of death, Jesus is acknowledged as "blameless." He is what Abram could not wholly be: Faithful to God, even if it meant he must sacrifice his own life on the altar of humanity. But here's the kicker: Jesus is not only son sacrificed, but also becomes the ram (Gen. 22:13) who takes the place of Isaac and the generations to follow—including ours—and restores the promise of life and a future for us.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trust in Jesus' Flesh***

God's covenant promise to Abram involved a name change: He and his wife went from being called Abram and Sarai, to being known by their descendents (in blood and in faith) as Abraham and Sarah. So we, who are marked with God's covenant promise in Holy Baptism, receive a name change. Like our forbearers we go from being "no people" to being "God's people" (1 Peter 2:10), called into the household of God. But we trust, not because God has delivered on some promise, but because, in Jesus, God can be trusted. We look at Jesus on the cross, and risen from death, and we see God being a God we can't live without.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Hope of Generations***

God delivered Abraham from the plight of having to choose between God and God's promise. And, in Christ, God has delivered us from the same impossible choice. Saved by Christ (who is both Son and ram) we are delivered into a new life that is meant as gift—not just for our generation, but for every generation. So the God of Abraham, who also became known as the God of Isaac and Jacob, is the hope of ours and every new generation in

Christ. And, as inheritors of God's promise enfleshed in Christ, we look for new, vital ways to bequeath the very Gift and Giver we have received, so that God is know as the God of Lori, and Bill, and Carol, and [fill your name in here]!