

Focus on Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” W. Sibley Towner

Everlasting Covenant (17:2–7). Yahweh now identifies the promise as “my covenant,” a term that emerges throughout chapter 17 as the dominating motif (thirteen uses in 17:2–22 alone). The verses of our pericope describe the covenant as a unilateral gift or grant by God to Abram that he should become “the ancestor of a multitude of nations” (v. 4), and that he should become “exceedingly numerous. . . . fruitful” (vv. 2, 6). Progeny were necessary if the elect line were to wind like a scarlet thread from the promise of universal blessing in Genesis 12:1–3 down through the entire patriarchal saga and to the end of the Bible. The fact that the covenant is said also to be “everlasting” (v. 7; see also vv. 13, 19) suggests the possibility of entering into a nurturing and right relationship with God was always open.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Mark Husbands

We are to learn that the one who seeks to restore and reconcile humanity by establishing a covenant with Abraham is the *one* true God. Covenant devotion to God requires exclusive worship of and obedience to YHWH. As the drama of the Old Testament demonstrates, the single-minded love and worship of *YHWH* is a hard-won lesson. All too often, our acts underscore what Hendrikus Berkhof calls an “intensifying and never-ending dialectic” of divine faithfulness and creaturely unfaithfulness.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Craig Kocher

The pastoral gift of Genesis 17 is its reminder that at the center of our being rest blessing and promise, naming and covenant. We are followers of the One who established a never-ending covenant with Abraham and brought that covenant to fullness in Jesus Christ. In our baptism we have been given a new name, “disciple of Jesus,” that tells us everything we need to know about ourselves and everything we need to know about God.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”

Barbara Brown Taylor

We do not head straight to Easter from the spa or the shopping mall. Instead, we are invited to spend forty days examining the nature of our own covenant with God. Upon what does that relationship depend? What do we trust to give us life? What concrete practices allow us to become bodily involved with God? If we were to ask God for a new name, what might that name be? What new purpose might that name signify? While Lent focuses naturally on the example of Jesus, Jesus focused just as naturally on the example of Abraham (Matt. 8:11). Like his forebear in faith, Jesus walked toward God’s promise with steady trust, leading God to give him a new name too: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”