

Genesis 17:1-14 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, <sup>2</sup>that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." <sup>3</sup>Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, <sup>4</sup>"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup>No 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. <sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup>And 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. <sup>8</sup>And 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."

<sup>9</sup>And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup>He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, <sup>13</sup>both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

---

### Announcements:

1. Members Meeting March 28th 11-12 right after the service
2. RCD Kids Volunteer Training: 3/21 11am -12pm
3. Next Class: Biblical Manhood & Womanhood March 26th

## Genesis 17:1-14 | The Sign of the Covenant pt 1

This is one of those texts in scripture from which you could just about preach the entire Bible. In it such questions as the nature of salvation, the importance of sacraments, the extent of the covenant promises, salvation by faith alone, the relationship of faith and works, and everywhere in scripture where it says, I will be your God and you will be my people could be proclaimed.

But most simply, what is given here by God to Abram is the sign of the covenant. It is a particular sign, to a particular man and his offspring, and it will mark God's people for centuries and generations. But it is all grounded in this hope that we will be God's people and he will be our God. Today we're going to look at the giver of the covenant, the offer of the covenant and the requirement of the covenant. This is just a part one, because we need to camp out in this text a bit longer in order to see the implications of this covenant for us today.

# 1. God Almighty

Genesis 17:1-2 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, <sup>2</sup> that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."

This is four years after Ishmael's birth, and Abram still has no offspring from his wife Sarai. The child of promise has not been born. But once again the Lord appears to Abram but this time with a new name. God reveals himself as El Shaddai, God almighty! And he calls Abram to walk before him and be blameless.

This verse will be echoed by Christ in the Great commission, When Jesus says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him, therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:18-20). It is the announcement of God's absolute authority and then it is a call to a discipleship relationship with God that walks in obedience to the Lord's ways, and then will be accompanied by a sign. For Jesus in the new covenant this sign is baptism which extends to all nations. For Abram it is a sign of circumcision for the households of a particular bloodline. Have your ears open for the parallels.

Now back to our text today. Why this call for Abram to walk before God and be blameless? It is the condition upon which God may make his covenant with Abram and might multiply Abram greatly. Notice this is not God driving a bargain, these are not the conditions upon which God can get all that he desires, but the conditions upon which God can give all that he desires. The conditions are no less than absolute blamelessness before God.

Genesis 17:3 Then Abram fell on his face...

God has shown himself to Abram many times. In response, Abram has obeyed God, believed God, inquired further of God. But here before God Almighty who requires of him perfect obedience, Abram falls on his face. What if God exists and requires of you perfect obedience? There is a part of me while I'm writing this sermon that wants to stop there and let that question sit. Abram has encountered just that reality. This is the relational context of the covenant.

Now God lays out the covenant to Abram in the standard terms of any covenant: it has promises and stipulations. As for me and as for thee.

## 2. Promises

In the promises of the covenant, God gives (1) Identity of the Covenant (2) Prestige of the Covenant (3) The Scope and Scale of the Covenant and the (4) The Heart of the Covenant.

Genesis 17:4-5 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No 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.

**Identity of the Covenant:** Make no mistake Abram, the covenant is with you. And his own name will change and be expanded to capture the breadth of the covenant. He will be the father of a multitude of nations, and will therefore go by Abraham. Merely high father, is too small. He will be the high father of multitudes. The promise of God becomes the heart of Abraham's identity. It is an identity which is not earned, nor inherited, nor chosen, but bestowed.

Genesis 17:6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.

**Prestige of the Covenant:** From the promised seed of Abram will come forth the prestige of kings and multitudes. We will see these kingdoms form throughout the rest of Genesis, but beyond that we see the seeds of the Christian hope of all nations gathered into God's people in this promise.

Genesis 17:7-8 And 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. <sup>8</sup> And 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,

**Scope and Scale of the Covenant:** It is generational and everlasting. Extending not just to Abraham but to his children, and his children's children forever. And the land that God has promised to give Abram will be to his offspring forever.

Genesis 17:8 "...and I will be their God."

**The Heart of the Covenant:** Beyond all of the particular benefits of the covenant, none come close to this. This is the covenant. That God will be their God. This is all of it. He will be our God and we will be his people. This is the whole hope of existence.

Remember a year ago when we looked at the first chapters of Genesis. We see a created world, and humanity rebels against God. God reaches out to those rebellious people and says, I will be your God and you will be my people.

### 3. Stipulations

Genesis 17:9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

Here is the stipulations, the "as for you" of God's covenant with Abraham. It is for him and for his offspring for generations.

Genesis 17:10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

It is only circumcision. What's shocking here is the total simplicity of the covenant. It is just to be marked as God's people. God set's apart and commits these people to himself, and he gives them the symbol of their inclusion in circumcision. The description of the life that follows will not be made explicit until Mt. Sinai at the giving of the ten commandments. They are pledged first to a master, and then to that masters way of life.

Genesis 17:11-12 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,

We must understand the nature of the sign, and the extent of the sign.

**First of all the nature of the sign.** What has Abraham been wrestling with in terms of his promise? That he will have offspring by his own loins! Look at the sign of the promise! He won't get to engage with pursuing that promise without acknowledging the sign. This symbol grows in meaning throughout its incorporation in the Jewish people and it serves as a boundary of the promise.

Genesis 17:14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

The sign is one of cutting off and it is a marker of inclusion. To be outside the sign is to be cut off from the community. It is a symbol of God making a Holy and set apart people for himself for his own possession, and it is on the means of the fulfillment of this promise that God places his sign.

**Secondly the extent of the sign:** The sign is extended to Abraham and his offspring. This means that it is important that we grasp that the sign is not

only the sign of Abraham's faith. It is the sign of this truth, that God will make us righteous by faith.

The sign couldn't be a sign of the faith of the one who receives it. Ishmael receives it and he is not a man of faith, countless Jewish people throughout the narrative of the Old Testament demonstrate that they are not people of faith although they had the sign of circumcision.

When we understand this truth we are grasping something about the sacrament of circumcision that tells us about the nature of sacraments generally and this truth that is echoed through all of scripture. We are made righteous by faith, and here is the promise that God extends to us that we need to be constantly reminded of which he reminds us of through the physical sacraments that he gives to us. The sacrament does not give you the faith to find your assurance, but it provides a physical assurance that to be God's people all you need is faith.

After Christ this sacrament transforms into the sacrament not of blood but of washing in baptism. And this is why a consistent view throughout church history has been the baptism of infants. I'm not asking you to buy into that but I do want to create a plausibility structure for that view which flows out of this understanding of the covenant to Abraham not as one that Christ broke off but fulfilled.

### **Not Unconditional, Absolute.:**

I thought when we looked at Genesis 15 we saw God call Abram righteous by faith, and then make a covenant with him, and then only God pass through to seal the covenant. But now it looks like God is dependent upon the works of Abram to bless him, especially by requiring this sign of circumcision. When God passed through the carcasses, didn't God make an unconditional promise to Abram, so that his salvation would be secured basically no matter what Abram did?

And the answer is no. Unconditional is the wrong word. God made an absolute and certain promise to Abram but it was extremely conditional. We see that it requires absolute and perfect obedience, obedience of the offspring of Abraham. But don't you see, this is the obedience that God provides, through Christ, Abraham's offspring. Who provides perfect obedience, and perfect atonement for the cost of the broken covenant. Jesus was treated as one who was cast out so that we could be brought in, and counted totally righteous in God's sight by having faith in him alone.

I will be your God you will be my people.