

When God Starts Talking — Delivery Transcript

Genesis 17 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, February 18, 2024 · Faith in the Waiting

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A little bit. If you're new to our church, we typically preach through books of the Bible at Broadview and we've been working our way through the book of Genesis. It's one of the best books of the Bible, first books of the Bible, fundamental, foundational, a great way to learn about the reality of the universe and how God relates to us. And we're at one of those times in the book of Genesis where it's peak Bible. It's one of the key texts—understanding this text kind of like a key unlocks a lot of other parts of the Bible.

And so if you have your Bible, we're going to be in Genesis chapter 17. And Genesis chapter 17, for all of you math nerds out there, follows Genesis chapter 16. And it's really important when you're reading a verse to keep it in terms of its context, because in Genesis chapter 16, Abraham had one of those moments where he absolutely blew it. And he's been in a season of his life, I think, for about 14 years that I'll just characterize as the spiritual desert. There's a spiritual dry season. And if you've been walking with the Lord for any length of time, or even if you're not a Christian and you've been trying to seek after the Lord and practicing some kind of spiritual life, you've probably encountered seasons where it just felt like God was silent, felt like God was distant.

We always sing that song, Waymaker, even when I don't see it you're working, you'd say, Yeah, I don't know if I feel that. I don't know that I feel that God is working. You come to church, you everybody else is singing and raising their hands and you're just cold inside or you read the Bible and it's just, you know, there's nothing—nothing really resonates, nothing really there. You pray and you feel like your words just kind of hit the ceiling and fall back down on the floor. What do you do in those seasons when God is silent?

That's what Abraham, I think, was encountering. If you finish Genesis chapter 16, it says that Abraham was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. And for those of you not familiar with the story, Ishmael was a son born between Abraham and Hagar, who was not originally his wife, wasn't his first wife anyway. She was a servant of his true wife or his first wife, Sarai. They had been promised by God that they were going to have a child, but God wasn't

delivering on their timetable, so they decided we'll take matters into our own hands and do it our way, since God doesn't seem to be wanting to do it. the way he said he would do.

And after making that tragic mistake, it has all kinds of collateral damage on their life and negatively impacts them in a serious, serious way. And that's where Genesis 16 ended. It kind of ended on a pretty tragic note in some ways, but also a hopeful note because God had revealed himself to Hagar and said, even though this is a mess, I'm committed to you, I'm committed to Abraham, I'm committed to my promise. Just go back, trust me, and let's wait it out and see what happens. And so that's what she does, and that's what Abraham does.

He names the child Ishmael as the Lord said. And 14 years go by. How do I know 14 years? Because Genesis 17 opens with the words, Abraham was 99 years old when Genesis 17 took place. So between 86 years old and 99 years old. You're looking at around 14 years, depending on how you calculate the math, of waiting on the Lord, not really knowing. If he's there. Now I'm reading into the text a little bit, but I think Moses put this dash in there on purpose. He was 86 when this happened.

And the next time God shows up, the next time God speaks to him, the next time God gives him a word, he's 99 years old. In those seasons when you feel like your prayers are just hitting the ceiling and flopping back on the ground and you're living with the regret and shame of doing something you knew God didn't want you to do and you shouldn't have done. And 14 years go by. How do you think you would feel? It'd be pretty tough, wouldn't it? Now we don't know if Abraham was in that spot.

I mean we've seen Abraham have wonderful seasons of faith and obedience to the Lord and joy in the Lord and contentment, but we've also seen him in the desert, right? We've seen him not cultivate his relationship with God in a meaningful way and we've seen what happened as a result. I think this is highlighted here as a reminder that even when you don't feel like God is working, it doesn't mean he's not working. And just because it feels like God is silent and he's not listening and he's not close, it doesn't mean that he's not working.

I mean the words of the song we sang for whatever other theological problems you may have with it, that is a true theological statement. Just because I don't feel it doesn't mean he's not working. Just because I don't see it doesn't mean that he's not working. I came across a quote this week from Chuck Swindoll that said that spiritual maturity is one of those foundational things that God must produce in our life, but often God will intentionally slow us down so that the roots can actually go deep. We live in a microwave culture.

Everything's immediate at our fingertips. We can have it on demand. But your relationship with God, much less your relationship with any other living person in this world, cannot be microwaved. It cannot be immediate. It takes time. You have to cultivate that. And sometimes the Lord will slow us down and even become seemingly silent so that our roots

can go down in a way that they otherwise would not. The quote from Chuck Swindoll was—let's see if I can remember it. If I can't remember, let me pull it up here. I'm getting old, y'all.

That's why I wrote it down. Alright, if greed is the enemy of money. And I can't read my handwriting. Oh, here we go. Greed is the enemy of money, and lust is the enemy of sex. Pride is the enemy of power, then speed is the enemy of depth. It's a really powerful quote. And it's not enemy, it's the demon. If greed is the demon of money, if lust is the demon of sexual power is the pride is the power pride is the demon of power and speed is the enemy of depth.

And it really is when it comes to your relationship with God You cannot hurry it along. There are times in order to teach you that lesson, God will slow you down. And it will feel as though God is distant and silent, but He's not. He's still working. So what do you do in those moments? You do what Abraham did. And what you see in Genesis chapter 17 is an encounter between God and Abraham. And it's important in those seasons where God feels silent to continue pursuing encounters with the Lord. Whether it's every morning when you get up opening up your Bible and spending time with Him alone, unhurried, undistracted time alone with God, or coming to a Sunday morning worship service or a Wednesday night prayer meeting and seeking the corporate presence of God with other brothers and sisters in Christ, we pursue encounters with God.

In fact, that's one of our core values. We talked about this January, our five core values. One of them is that we foster tangible encounters with the living God because we believe God can do what more in one moment. A true encounter with a living God can do more in your life in one moment than what any other person can do in a lifetime. What you or your family or a whole group of church people can manufacture in a lifetime is nothing compared to what God, the living God, can do in an instant.

That's why encounters with God are important and that's why Abraham needed to continue seeking after the Lord even when those spiritual seasons struck. If you're if you're taking notes, I really believe that encounters with God help establish his will for your life. Your thoughts of the so much of the way you live is determined by how you think about the world and how you think about the world is determined by what you think about God. And so much of what you think about God is determined by your encounters with the Lord in the Word and in corporate worship.

And so keep pursuing encounters with God. And if I could say anything, if I could say anything to those of you who are this morning in one of those seasons where it feels like God is silent, I would plead with you to keep showing up, keep coming Sunday after Sunday, Wednesday after Wednesday, even though you don't feel it. Because God is doing things in those encounters with his word, just like he did in the life of Abraham. So what does he do

with Abraham? Well in Genesis 17, in verse 1, it says he was 99 years old when the Lord appeared to him, and then he reveals himself.

As God Almighty tells Abraham, this is what I want you to do, and then reminds Abraham of a promise. So three reminders when you encounter the Lord. This is going to set up our text before we read it. He's going to the Lord is going to remind Abraham who he is, the Lord is going to remind Abraham of what he wants, and the Lord is going to remind Abraham of his covenant promise. And that's what happens anytime we encounter God in worship. He reminds us of who he is. He reminds us of what he wants, and he reminds us of his covenant promise.

In Genesis 17, it looks a little different than what it looks like today. But the but the parallels are absolutely the same. So let's pick it up chapter 17 verse 1. Abraham was 99 years old and the Lord appeared to him saying, I am God Almighty. I am God Almighty. Live in my presence and be blameless. I will set up my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you greatly. And then Abraham fell down, face down, and God spoke with him. And so the three things that the Lord reminds him of is who he is, what he wants, and what he's promised.

And I think it's really interesting. The Lord reveals himself as El Shaddai. That's the Hebrew name for God. It means God Almighty. It's the first time that this word, Hebrew word, is used in the Old Testament. It's used six different times in the book of Genesis, I think 42 times in total in all of the Bible. The time where it shows up most often outside of Genesis is the book of Job. And I think that's instructive because God oftentimes in his kindness will reveal himself to you in ways that are directly relevant to the situation that you're facing in life.

Abram was facing a situation in his life where he had tried to take matters into his own hands since God isn't able. I'm going to have to do it myself, and he made a mess as a result. Abraham is about to be instructed by the Lord. You're going to do these incredible, wonderful, supernatural things, but you're not going to do them. I'm going to do them through you and in you because I am El Shaddai. I am God Almighty. It's a Hebrew word. Some people say it has to do with the mountaintop.

Other people say it has to do with power and ability. You can kind of put them together. If you've ever climbed a mountain, and I'm not talking like west Texas hills, I'm saying like a real mountain, like if you go to Colorado or You know they have a double mountain in Rotan. You could climb Double Mountain in Rotan. It's pretty small, but you might not have the same feeling. But if you've ever gone to a real mountain and you crest that peak, you know what I'm talking about? That feeling that you get of yes, it is finished.

Tetelestai. It is done. It is accomplished. That that feeling of I've overcome the challenges. I've conquered the mountain. That reality is God is saying, I am that. I the essence of who I am is that victory, that power, that triumph, that mountaintop experience. I am that God. And Abraham need to be reminded that that is the God he served because of the circumstances that he was in. And that may be what the Lord is trying to remind you of today, or maybe in a different time of worship, the Lord in his word, kindly, gently, because he's the God of grace, remind you, I'm a God of compassion, I'm a God of mercy, I'm a God of holiness.

When you're running from Him in a prodigal season of rebellion, I'm a God of holiness, I'm a God of mercy. And comfort when you're in the midst of pain and difficulty and you feel like all hope is lost. God reveals himself specifically in specific ways related to your specific situation, which is why you need to keep pursuing encounters with him, because encounters with God remind you of who he is in your life. But he also reminds Abraham of what he wants. And what he wants, he puts it in two ways.

He says, I want you to live in my presence. The ESV, I think, says, walk before me. But it's not as though God is localized geographically where you could kind of parade yourself in front of Him. That's God is spirit, right? He sometimes manifests himself in a burning bush and stuff like that, but there's God does not have a body except in the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. Generally speaking, God is spirit. So he's not saying like come over here and parade yourself in front of me. He's saying what the CSB translates it as, which is live in my presence.

Abraham, I want you to start living as if I'm with you everywhere that you go, as if I see everything that you do. I don't know what it is. One of my guilty pleasures in life is watching really dumb movies like anybody have ever seen Joe Dirt? Or what's that other really dumb one? Napoleon Dynamite. Some of you guys like The Office. I think it's a similar kind of thing. It's like it's not even funny, but it's so dumb that you'd laugh at it Joe Dirt was one of those movies and one of the lines that always stuck with me from Joe Dirt, which I do not recommend, don't hear me recommending it.

One of the movies, one of the lines I remember is, is this where you want to be when Jesus comes back y'all remember is this where you want to be when Jesus comes back making fun of Joe Dirt's mama? Y'all remember that line? And that's bad theology because Jesus doesn't just see when Jesus comes back, okay? Jesus always sees. Because the Lord always sees. If I go to heaven, you're there. If I go to Sheol, you're there. As far east as I can go, you're there. If I go as far west as I want to go, you're there.

You're always there. And that's what the Lord is saying. I'm El Shaddai. I am with you everywhere that you go, and you need to start living as if that's true. So the words that you speak, speak them as though I was standing there. The places that you go, go as though I was

standing there. The internet history that you're or the internet activities that you're engaging in, engage in those activities as if I was standing there. Because I am standing there. I'm with you always. And Abraham needed to be reminded of that.

And then the second thing he says is, I want you to be blameless. Which that's always a high goal, right? Be perfect. But he's not talking obviously he can't be talking about sinless perfection. This word gets used throughout the Old Testament, some some adjacent in the New Testament, Jesus saying, be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. I don't think he's saying sinless perfection because that's not attainable, but what he is saying, and what the Lord I think still wants from us today, is a spirit of absolute surrender. A spirit of saying, I will hold nothing back.

I will not cling to this little area and do it my way here, even though I'm obedient everywhere else. I am fully surrendered. Whatever you want, wherever you want, however you want, I'm yours. That's what it means to be blameless. It means to be fully You cast yourself fully on the Lord. It's that meekness that is talked about in the Beatitudes of strength under control. All of who I am, Lord, it's yielded to you. And that's what God wants from us today. He wants us to be fully surrendered to him, and he wants us to recognize he is.

Here. He is with us. He's here right now. And there's times where God is present in a very tangible, special way that we pray for every Sunday, but He is with you everywhere that you go and you need to be reminded of that and you will be reminded of that in times. Of worship when you encounter the Lord. So keep pursuing encounters with God because they remind you of who he is. They remind you of what he wants. But this passage is in particular focused on God reminding Abraham of what he promised.

God will remind you of his covenant promises. And these covenant promises to Abraham are foundational not only to his life but to every generation that followed after him. And really for us to fully understand our relationship with God through Christ. We need to grapple with God's relationship with Abraham and his descendants through the Abrahamic covenant. So let's time out. You're going to have to kind of change your thinking mode or listening mode to learning mode for just a minute, okay? I don't have any cool little funny stories or anything like that.

I'm just going to teach you some biblical theology about covenant. Okay? That's what if you look in verse two, the Lord says I want to remind you of my covenant promise. I will set up my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you greatly. This word is Hebrew word covenant. It's the Hebrew word berith. I think it shows up 48 times in the Old Testament. And it's a word that describes our relationship with God. But it's not just any a covenant is a relationship between any two parties. You can do a marriage covenant, you can have a religious covenant between God and people.

But what it does is it lays out the framework or the boundary lines for the relationship. Here's what I'm going to do, here's what you're going to do, and here's what's going to happen if we do what we said we're going to do. This covenant. Is like every biblical covenant. It consists of five major building blocks. And the reason I want to go through all five major building blocks is because if you can start to think of covenants through these five layers you will really understand why God creates covenants with his people.

The first layer is the covenant mediator the second covenant, the second layer is the covenant conditions, the third is the covenant community, the fourth is the covenant sign, and the fifth is the covenant promise. So you've got a mediator conditions, the community, the sign, and the promise. And this passage, if you think about it, if you just read from where we are all the way to the end, you see all five of these covenant realities mentioned in the text. The first is the covenant mediator, and that's Abraham, and it's in verses four and five.

It says, as for me, here's my covenant with you. You, Abram, will become the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Abram. But your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations. And so the covenant mediator is Abraham. He gets a name change, right? That's a big deal. His first name Abram meant mighty Father. You know the way I remember it? Big daddy. He's big Daddy Abraham. He's a big strong mighty daddy, but he didn't have any children. And so what the Lord is saying to him now is you're not just going to be the exalted father, you're not just big Daddy Abraham.

You're going to be the big daddy of all sorts of little babies. You're going to have so many descendants. And I know I've the Lord has said this to Abraham before, but now He's saying it to Abraham in a way that's going to flesh out the particulars of what that promise looks like. And I think it's a reminder for us that when God calls you to something, He doesn't often equipped he doesn't often call people who are equipped. He rather equips those whom he calls. He called Abraham, he was not equipped to be a father of many nations.

He had a wife that could not produce children. And he didn't really demonstrate all that good of a fathering for those that were not his children, but kind of related in some way. Now the Lord is saying, because of what I've called you to do, I'm now going to transform you. I'm going to change you into a person who can facilitate the call that I've put on your life. And that's something we need to be reminded of. The second thing that he mentions is the conditions of the covenant, and that's in verses six and following.

I'm going to make you extremely fruitful. I will make nations and kings come from you. This is the first mention of nations and kings. I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offsprings. Throughout their generations. I will if you go to the next one. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you and to you and all your future offspring. I will give the land where you are residing, all the land of Canaan. As a permanent possession, and I will be their God.

That's the conditions of the covenant. If you think about this articulation of God's covenant with Abraham And you compare it with the covenant mentioned in Genesis 12 and the covenant mentioned in Genesis 15, what you see is some progressive revelation of God giving Abraham more and more details of what the covenant's going to look like. So you can do this on your own time. But if you go back and read Genesis 12, God says if you'll follow me where I'm leading you, I will bless you. I will make your name great.

I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you. And so Abraham gets the revelation of the covenant. It's not as full-orbed as this one, but he steps out in faith, and what does God do? He honors the covenant. He blesses those who bless Abraham, like Lot, and in rescuing Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah being spared, but he also curses those who curse Abraham with Pharaoh in Egypt in Genesis chapter 13. So Genesis 13 shows God making good on his covenant.

Genesis 14 shows God making good on his covenant. And then in Genesis 15, God reaffirms the covenant. Except this time the Lord says to Abraham, My covenant that I make with you, I'm going to flesh it out even if you don't. Even if you don't make good on the terms of the covenant, I'm going to make good on the He walks through the carcasses of the animals as a way of saying, I swear on my life I will be committed to fulfilling the promise. And then you get to Genesis 16.

I'm sorry, the other thing that's mentioned in Genesis 15 is he tells Abraham to go and look at the stars of the sky and says, as numerous as the stars in stars are in the sky, so also will my descendants, so also will your descendants be. You get to Genesis 16, Abraham believing God's promise, can't stand to wait for God's timing, and so he takes matters into his own hands and kind of supplants and subverts what God said he was going to do in Genesis 15. Just wait on me. I'll do it if you'll wait on me.

But Abraham doesn't wait, he takes it into his own hands. And so now in Genesis 17 He's fleshing out the covenant even more. And he's saying, not only am I going to give you the land, I'm going to give you the land and your descendants. And not only am I going to give it to you and your descendants, I'm going to give it to you forever. It will always be your promised land. Then he also says, we're going to see this in a little bit, not also not only am I going to give you a child as I gave you through Hagar.

But I'm going to give you a child and confirm my covenant with your offspring, not through Hagar, but through your barren wife, Sarah. So you got a promised land, you got a promised descendants, but the thing that's the best thing, the most important thing of the covenant conditions is I will be your God and you will be my people. That's really what the covenant's all about because covenants are about relationship. He's saying, I want you to be with me, and I'm promising that I'm going to be with you forever and ever.

The expressions of it are going to look this way and this way and that way and that way, but at the end of the day, the big take-home point is you're with me and I'm with you. It's kind of like when you get married in your wedding ceremony, you give vows. Your vows are kind of the laying out the terms of the covenant that you're making. And so you're saying, well if you ever get sick You know, are really really ugly. That's okay. I'm going to be that wasn't in anybody's wedding vows.

I'm just go I'm just joking. If you ever get really sick, I'm going to be with you. If you ever get really rich, I'll be with you. If you get super poor I'll be with you. If you get super healthy, I'll be with you. Sickness and health, richer or poorer, better or worse. What's the thing you're saying above everything else? You're saying, I'm yours. I am all yours and you are all mine. And that's what God is saying in this covenant. I'm going to be your God and you're going to be my people.

We're going to be in relationship with each other. And that's the wonderful thing about this covenant. Those are the covenant conditions. The covenant community is where it gets interesting. He identifies the covenant community with Abraham and his descendants. You see that in verse 9. Obviously, God says to Abraham, as for you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, you're going to keep the covenant. But then he zeroes in on Sarah, if you'll skip down to verse 15, he confirms the covenant to the next generation, not with Hagar and Ishmael, but with Sarah and Isaac.

He says, as for your wife, Sarai, do not call her Sarai, because I'm changing her name too. She's going to be called Sarah. Sarai meant contentious wife, Sarah means beautiful princess. That's a nice name change. Sarah will be her name, and I will bless her. Indeed I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce, same language, nations. Kings of peoples will come from her. Then Abraham incredulously laughs at the Lord. Abraham fell face down and laughed, and he said to himself, how I like he said it to himself and not to the Lord, as if the Lord wasn't listening.

How can a man, how can a child be born to a man that's a hundred years old? And can Sarah, a 90-year-old woman, give birth? And so Abraham then says to God, how about Ishmael? Right? Ishmael's thirteen years old. I know I kind of messed up with the whole, you know, sleeping with her slave and all that, but He's a nice boy, you've obviously blessed him. It's the same thing that Abraham did earlier in Genesis 15 when he said, what about Lot? Can we not use Lot? Or in Genesis 12, what about Eliezer, you know, a servant from my household, and the Lord is adamant?

No. It'll be Sarah. He confirms in verse number next. Where is that? 22. But God said, no, your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac, which means laughter, by the way. I will confirm my covenant with him as a permanent covenant for his future offspring. As for Ishmael, I've heard you, I will certainly bless him, I will make him fruitful,

and I will multiply him greatly. He will father twelve tribal leaders and I will make him a great nation. But I will confirm my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this time next year.

So who's the covenant community? The covenant community is not everybody. Like you saw with the Noahic covenant, the whole world will never be judged again. The covenant community is Abraham and his descendants through the line of Sarah, which for Ishmael had to have been incredibly difficult to hear 13 years old, everything he knows. God has promised my dad to be a great, to be, to bless people, to have great descendants that God is going to bless the ends of the earth through his descendants. I'm his descendants. I'm going to be that thing that I'm going to be that man who fulfills the covenant.

And then the Lord comes along and says, no, I've chosen Sarah. Why does he choose Sarah? I think he chooses Sarah because she's barren and she's been barren for 99 years. I'm going to form, in other words, Abraham, I'm going to form a covenant community. That is miraculous. I'm going to take something that was representative of death and barrenness and hopelessness, and I'm going to transform it into life and blessing. I'm going to form a people who cannot point to themselves and say, look how good we are or look at our lineage and our background and how worthy we were of being chosen by God.

I'm going to choose people who didn't have any hope whatsoever and give them a hope. That's why he chooses Sarah. I don't I ultimately don't know why God chooses Sarah and doesn't choose Hagar, why chose Jacob and not his brother Esau. God's ways are mysterious to say the least. But the point is that this covenant community is narrowly defined. In some ways it's more expansive because God is saying, I'm not just going to bless you and your descendants, I'm going to give you this land forever. That's expanding the covenant. It's going to be confirmed for generation and generation, but it's also more narrowly restricted and that it's to Sarah and Sarah's descendants only.

Now if you think about today, what's going on today in the Middle East and what has been going on for decades and decades that you see a war between the descendants of Ishmael and the descendants of Isaac gives birth to Jacob. Jacob is the foundation of Israel. Jewish people as we know them today came through the line of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob. Ishmael is the descendants of many other Arab nations, and they're right now fighting it out over who owns the land, who has rights to the land.

And it's a political hot potato, but if you just take Genesis at face value and you read the language, it's a permanent covenant. That God is faithful to his promises and never reverses them or changes the terms midway through. What you have is a promise from God to give them that land as an eternal inheritance. So that's your community. And then you have your covenant promise. And the covenant promise the covenant sign, the covenant sign is the part

that we skipped over in verse 10 and following. This is my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you, which you're to keep.

Every one of your males must be circumcised. Who got up this morning so ready to talk about circumcision? You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskin to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and you throughout your generations, every male among you is to be circumcised at eight days old. Every male born in your household or purchased from any foreigner and not your offspring. In other words, your household servants, they're getting circumcised as well, even though they're not biologically related to you. Whether born in your household or purchased, he must be circumcised.

My covenant will be marked in your flesh as a permanent covenant. Now I didn't I'm not super excited to talk about circumcision. Let's just be honest. I'm not super excited to talk about that. If you don't know what circumcision is, go talk to your mom or your dad about it at home, what all that is. But I'm going to give you the theological significance of why circumcision. Because the sign of the covenant is chosen by God on purpose, right? And the covenant sign that God chooses is often related to the promise God is giving.

So when God promised I'm never going to flood the earth again, what sign did he give? He gave a rainbow. Is yes or no, is the rainbow related to when it rains? Yes. So it was related to God's judgment of flooding the earth. So the sign of the covenant points to the promise of the covenant. What does cutting off your foreskin have to do with God's promise? Well, if you go back to Genesis 3, they're in the garden, they sin against God, and it invites a curse into the world. There's enmity between husband and wife, there's pain in childbearing, there's passivity in a man's calling to lead his family, there's all of these implications, but right there in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, the Lord promises Adam and Eve that there will come a day, even though you've invited the curse into the world, there will come a day where someone through the seed of the woman, he will be born into the world and he will crush the head of the serpent and he will reverse the curse.

It's from the seed of the woman. In other words, wrapped up in your reproductive organs and that reproductive process, God's promise is inextricably linked in that that there's going to come a day. Born from the seed of woman, someone who will crush the head of the serpent. So does it not surprise that when God reconfirms the covenant through Abraham and says, I have not forgotten my promise, the Messiah will come, is it not surprising that he takes the male reproductive organ and says, I'm going to put a marker on that thing so that you never forget about my promise that the seed will one day come.

Of course that's what it means. And it may feel crass, and you know, why is God talking about that? You know, he shouldn't be doing that. That may have more to do with our cultural sensitivities than it does the Lord. He wanted something physical, something visible, something irrevocable. When you do that, you can't undo it, right? And he says that in

Genesis of the last verse that we just read, verse 12, it will be a permanent, eternal fixture of my covenant to you the other thing about circumcision, the reason I think the Lord chose circumcision, is because in that culture and the other cultures that practice circumcision in that day and age.

It was a purification thing. Even today people who talk about circumcision, there's health benefits, it's lower STDs, lower infection rates, lower whatever. At least that's what they tell people, you know, to get them to do it. But they back then they practiced that for a level of purity. It's not talking about the physical external purity only. I think that external purity of the flesh was pointing to a need for an even greater purity of heart. And if you look at the way the New Testament talks about circumcision, it's that we don't need to just be physically circumcised.

In fact, the New Testament doesn't say anybody needs to be circumcised. The New Testament says that Old Testament circumcision was pointing to the need for spiritual circumcision of the heart. An inner cleansing. It was never about the physical—it was never only about that physical sign for the Jewish people as a way of kind of separating them. It was pointing to their need for inward cleansing. That they cannot do to themselves for themselves. It must be done by God alone. And the last thing that the circumcision pointed to was the fulfillment of that seed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so Galatians talks about circumcision and there was a group of Christians who was saying these Gentile peoples they have to be circumcised and they have to obey the Jewish law, etc. Etc. And Paul comes along and says no because Jesus has fulfilled in his life. What circumcision was pointing to in the first place. It was pointing to the need for purification. It was pointing to a sign of the covenant. Jesus has fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant. He has completed it through his life, death, and resurrection, and he has given us a new covenant.

So we don't need to be circumcised, we need to be baptized and partakers of the Lord's Supper, because that's the new sign of the new covenant that we have received in Jesus Christ. And he even uses the language of a seed. The seed promised in Genesis 15, singular, is fulfilled in the seed, the offspring of Mary, Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of that promise. And so that's why he chose the sign of circumcision. And those who didn't take the sign of circumcision got the other end of the promise, which is the last covenant factor, number five, the covenant promise in verse 14.

If any male is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, then that man will be cut off from his people. For he has broken my covenant. I think there's a little play on words here in the Hebrew with the word cut off. He's—this sounds crass. But he's saying either You cut it off or you're cut off. Like you're not part of the covenant community. It's the other end of the promise. What is the promise of the covenant? The promise is I will be your God and you will be my people.

We will be in relationship with one another. If you're going to be in relationship with me as part of my covenant, then you've got to receive my covenant sign because the covenant sign is your way of saying I'm in. I'll do what it takes. I'm responding to the grace invitation of the Lord to be in relationship with me. And if you don't respond to God's invitation of grace, then you'll be cut off from his salvation. That's the promise. Alright, we're done talking about it. Y'all can breathe. So you put all those five things together.

What do you see? You see the covenant mediator, the covenant community, the covenant conditions, the covenant sign, and the covenant promise. If you just stand back bird's eye view, you see that this covenant, as is all of God's covenants, they are all covenants of grace. God did not choose Abraham because he was worthy of it. He did not choose to never flood the earth again because the world wasn't wicked. All of God's covenants from David to Jesus all the way through are covenants of grace. But God's grace always demands a response from those who are invited to receive it.

And that's what you see at the very end of our passage in verse 22 and following. They're invited to respond to God's grace invitation. It says in verse 22, when he finished talking with Abraham, God withdrew. So Abraham, now it's in your court. What are you going to do with God's invitation? And so Abraham took his son Ishmael and those born in his household or purchased. Every male among the members of Abraham's household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on that very day, just as God had said to him.

It was immediate. It was complete. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised. And on that same day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. And all the men of his household, whether born in his household or purchased from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. Now you got to remember that some of these guys are older. These are not light in the loafers guys. These are not like weenie baby mama boy people, these are warriors, these are people who went with Abraham to fight against the kings of the east.

Some of these guys had to have been like fifty, sixty, eighty years old. And Abraham's saying, you're in or you're out. God's grace always demands a response. So you're either going to be part of this covenant community or you're going to be cut out from the covenant community. But if you're going to be part of it, this is what's required. Now for those of you who are a little bit skittish about baptism, you can just imagine if we were doing it the old way. Aren't you glad we aren't doing it the old way?

The point is that grace demands a response. God has offered us an invitation. Now, is our covenant through Abraham? No. We have a new covenant. We have a new covenant. And the head of the new covenant, the mediator of the new covenant is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is an infinitely, vastly superior mediator than was Abraham or David or Moses or any other

representative. The conditions of this new covenant is that we can be transferred from the kingdom of darkness and reconciled with our Creator and ushered into the kingdom of light.

The conditions of this new covenant is that you can have forgiveness of sins and cleansing from unrighteousness in your life. The conditions of this new covenant is that even though we were faithless, God remained faithful and he did for us in Jesus what we could never do for ourselves. He died on the cross for our sins. He bore the penalty for our shame and absorb the wrath of God that we deserved eternally in a place called hell. He did all of that so that we might be reconciled to God, so that he could be our God, and so that we could be his people.

That's the conditions of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. And the sign of the new covenant is baptism and the Lord's Supper. And just like the old covenant sign had something to do with God's promise, this new covenant sign has something to do with God's promise, and that we were dead in our trespasses and sins, and so we are buried with Christ. Through death in baptism, but God raised us to walk in newness of life because this power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that gives life to our mortal bodies.

And so we go down into the water, representative of our death to sin and self in the old way of life, and we're raised to newness of life coming up out of the water. Baptism points to the reality of the covenant. And the Lord's Supper is the same way. The bread is the body of Christ broken for us. And the and the grape juice in Baptist world, the wine is the blood of Christ, shed for us and it points to the reality of that gospel and the reality of God's covenantal love towards us in Jesus Christ.

And just like the covenant with Abraham, the new covenant signs are not given until there is a demonstration of faith. It's one of the reasons we don't baptize babies. It's one of the reasons we practice believers baptism because first they had to believe. They had to accept the covenant before they received the sign of circumcision and so it is today. It's after your conversion that you undergo the rite of baptism or the sacrament of baptism and receive the covenant sign and display it with your life. It's the other reason when we take the Lord's Supper we say, if you're not a Christian We advise against partaking of this meal because it's meant for covenant.

It's meant for those who have entered into relationship, and the covenant promise, of course, is that because Jesus was cut off, because he was crucified outside the city, because he bore our shame and paid for our sins, because he was the one who was cast out. We can now be brought in, and God cannot be our God, and we can be his people, not because of anything good that we have done, but because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf. And his great love for us. That's the new covenant.

Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, a better covenant, and it is a permanent covenant. It is a covenant that once you enter into it You can never lose your salvation. You will be eternally secure, and God will enable you to persevere to the end, just as circumcision was a fixed visible, unchanging symbol of your relationship with God when you die to self and you put your faith in Jesus for salvation, he is keeping you eternally secure in the palm of his hand. And so the reason you need to understand Abraham's covenant is because it points to the even greater covenant, the covenant of all covenants, our covenant in Jesus Christ.

And that covenant demands a response. And so as we enter into a time of response this morning, I want to put before you how the Lord might be leading you to respond to Him. For some of you, it may be a response to salvation. You've never made Jesus the Lord of your life. And the Holy Spirit is saying, I am offering you an opportunity to have a relationship with the God who created you. A relationship that isn't based on what you do or what you have done or what you ever will do, but a relationship that is based on somebody else's righteousness on your behalf.

A relationship that's based on what Jesus has done because of God's great love for you. And if you've never repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus for salvation, you're going to have an opportunity to respond publicly to the message and say, Jesus, I surrender to you. I'm going to give my life completely and wholly, just as he said to Abraham, walk before me and be blameless. You're saying, Lord, I'm surrendering everything to you. For others of you, it may be related to the sign of the covenant. It may be related to baptism, maybe even the Lord's Supper, which we'll take, which we'll celebrate next week.

It may be that the Lord's leading you to demonstrate publicly that you belong to Him. You made a decision when you were really, really young, or maybe you made a decision in your adult life, but you've never been baptized as a public demonstration of that commitment. And the Lord would say to you: you need to put the sign of the covenant after faith, not before it.