

# The Covenant of Circumcision

## Genesis 17

Abram has spent 13 years watching Sarai not conceive and Ishmael grow up before him (16:16; v1). Thirteen years reflecting on his and Sarai's attempt obtain the promise through polygamy, and now he is a 99-year-old man and Sarai is 89. Time isn't flying, but God appears and reveals Himself in a new way, with a new name: "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." God has been El-Roi, the God who sees (16:13), and now El Shaddai shows mercy and power, giving even greater blessings through the covenant of circumcision.

### ***Who is involved in the covenant of circumcision?***

First, Abram. His name means "exalted father". His life as a childless man has been ironic, but this doesn't stop God from upping the ante to *Abraham*, "a multitude of nations" (vv4-7). Three times he is told he will father nations. Naming is identity-shaping, and here God gives him the name that most people know on the earth today. Despite his and Sarai's age, he knows God's promise will triumph (Rom. 4:19-21). Secondly, a multitude of nations are a part of the covenant, and this does mean a blacksmith here and a programmer there: "kings shall come from you" (v6). What happens when a king converts? The nation follows, or has converted already. Third, it's not just people a long way off, but Abraham's offspring are members of the covenant: "to be God to you and your offspring after you" (v7). Every male would be circumcised the eighth day (v12). God's grace preempts the teenage years, even the terrific twos. Circumcision is not merely outward: "He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:11; cf. 1 Cor. 7:14). Fourth, not just physical offspring, but everyone, free or servant, citizen or foreigner, in his household will be circumcised (vv12-13). God's grace and salvation, received by faith, cut across all familial, economic and national boundaries. Fifth, Sarai will not be a tribal "my princess", but "Princess", a matriarch of nations (vv15-16). She comes last in the list not as the least, but as the crown (Prov. 12:4). God is the initiator and principle party of the covenant. He gives land, but most of all, Himself (v8). To reject the covenant is to reject Him (v14).

### ***What is the sign of the covenant?***

**We've seen circumcision is a sign and seal of Abraham's righteousness which he had by faith (Rom. 4:11). Why a sign at all? Because we are embodied creatures, and what we do with our bodies affects our souls. This is why those who are baptized must repent of sin, and those who take the Supper can't participate in idolatry (Rom. 6:3-4, 12; 1 Cor. 10:16-22). We know this at the most basic level of words and handshakes. Circumcision is not only outward, but includes the heart (Dt. 10:16, 30:6; Jer. 4:4). But why *this* sign? Last chapter Abram and Sarai's idolatry for children led them to sin. Now every time they would be intimate, they would remember God's grace and the absolute need for it. This is a bloody, painful, evangelistic rite that rebukes tribalism and pride. Christians no longer need to be circumcised in the flesh, but must be circumcised by Christ (Col. 2:11-12).**

### ***What does it mean to be a part of this covenant?***

**The sign means simultaneously that God will multiply Abraham's descendants, and all those descendants need to repent of their sins. God begins by telling him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly" (vv1-2). *Blameless* does not mean *sinless*. It means believing God and doing what He says, including confessing sin. When Abraham heard his son would be born to Sarah, he fell on his face and laughed (vv16-17). He doesn't doubt, but it's hilarious. God takes what seem like the tragedies of his life and makes them all scenes in His great comedy. Every time they said or heard Isaac's name, they would remember. Isaac's blessing took nothing away from Ishmael; he ought to have trusted God and been faithful to the covenant (vv20-21). Abraham's laughing faith went into action that same day and his household was circumcised (vv26-27). His faith continues to spread.**

## NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

### Today's Passage: Genesis 17:4-6, 12-13, 17

*And God said to him, 4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 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. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 12 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, 13 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. 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"*

1. "Abram" means "exalted father". What new name does God give him, and what does it mean (verses 4-6)?
2. What did God tell Abraham to do with all the males in his household (verses 12-13)?
3. The apostle Paul says in Romans 4 that Abraham's faith was strong, believing God would give him a child even though he was 99 years old! What does he do in verse 17, and why do you think he did it?
4. Draw a picture of 99-year-old Abraham laughing on the ground, excited and overwhelmed at the thought of having a son.

### Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

*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. —Genesis 17:5*