

# The Renewal of the Covenant

## *Genesis 17:1-27*

- I. THE PRELIMINARIES TO THE COVENANT (Genesis 17:1-8)
  - A. The Revelation in the Preliminaries (Genesis 17:1)
    1. The time of the revelation
      - a. When Abram was 99 years old.
      - b. The first recorded speaking of God to Abram in approximately 14 years (cp. Genesis 16:16).
      - c. During this time Ishmael had been born and had grown to be a 13-year-old boy.
      - d. Very likely the promises that God had made to Abram in Genesis 15 had begun to fade in his mind. Therefore, this visit from the Lord was likely a welcomed one.
    2. The God of the revelation
      - a. The “*Almighty God*” (Genesis 17:1; Genesis 35:11; Exodus 6:3; 2 Corinthians 6:18)
      - b. The commanding presence of God
        - (1) Right away God let Abram know who He was.
        - (2) When God speaks, He commands all to listen.
        - (3) This introduction likely caught Abram’s attention.
  - B. The Requirements in the Preliminaries (Genesis 17:1)
    1. The steps in the requirement – “*Walk before me*”
      - a. Abram is to walk “*before*” God.
      - b. When a person walks before someone, they are in their sight.
      - c. Abram is to walk with a continual awareness of the Lord seeing all that he does. It is to be God conscious, something that few people are today (Acts 23:1; Acts 24:16; Ephesians 4:1).
    2. The standard in the requirement – “*Be thou perfect*”
      - a. While we understand the word *perfect* has a dual meaning, at times meaning “complete” and other times meaning “sinless”, it should be understood that God wanted Abram to walk as close to Him as possible.
      - b. Abram was to be complete before God walking before Him and following the commands that He gave him.

- c. Even for the believer today, the Lord would have us to be complete in Him, striving to be ever more like His Son (1 Kings 8:61; Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 4:1; cp. Acts 9:31; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10; Colossians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; Hebrews 13:21; examples: Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 2:6).
- C. The Resolve in the Preliminaries (Genesis 17:2)
1. The subjects in the preliminaries – *“I will make my covenant between me and thee”*
  2. The goals in the preliminaries
    - a. This is a renewal by God about the covenant for Abram.
    - b. It introduces the subject of the covenant; a subject God will enlarge upon in this revelation to Abram.
- D. The Response to the Preliminaries (Genesis 17:3, 4)
1. The posture of Abram – *“Abram fell on his face”* (Genesis 17:3)
    - a. A posture of humility (Exodus 3:6; see context Exodus 34:8; Isaiah 6:5-6; Mathew 17:6)
    - b. A posture of reverence (Leviticus 9:23-24; Numbers 16:22, 45; Joshua 5:14; Revelation 1:17)
  2. The promptness of the response
    - a. Abram bowed quickly before God when he learned that it was God speaking with him.
    - b. This showed that God had priority in Abram’s life, and that when God spoke, Abram did not put God on hold (Isaiah 66:1-2).
  3. The productivity of the response (Genesis 17:3)
    - a. The Bible says: *“God talked with him”*
    - b. This is right after Abram bowed before God.
      - (1) These two above actions are related.
      - (2) When a man is willing to humble himself before God, then God will work with that man (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).
      - (3) If we want God to speak with us and instruct us, then we must be willing to humble ourselves before Him.
        - (a) Those who honour God will learn from God.
        - (b) Spiritual ignorance is often a result of disrespect of God.
- E. The Renaming in the Preliminaries (Genesis 17:5)
1. The renaming of Abram
    - a. The Lord takes this time to give Abram a new name

- b. This new name would identify him as to the role that God would use him for.
2. The meaning of the names
  - a. From Abram – (meaning *exalted father*)
  - b. To Abraham – (meaning *father of many nations*)
- F. The Reviewing in the Preliminaries (Genesis 17:6-8)
  1. The review of the fruitfulness – “*I will make thee exceeding fruitful*”
  2. The review of the faithfulness – “*I will establish my covenant between me and thee*”
  3. The review of the future – “*And thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant*”
  4. The review of the faith – “*To be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee... I will be their God*”
  5. The review of the land – “*And I will give unto thee, and unto thy seed after thee, the land... for an everlasting possession*” (Genesis 15:7-21; Genesis 28:4; Genesis 48:4; Psalm 105:9, 11)

## II. THE PRECEPT IN THE COVENANT (Genesis 17:9-14)

- A. The Group included in the Precept (Genesis 17:9)
  1. The command to obey.
  2. Abraham and his seed after him.
  3. Those in Abraham’s house (Genesis 17:12-13)
- B. The Giving of the Precept (Genesis 17:10-14)
  1. All male children to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10)
  2. To be a token of the covenant between Abraham and his seed between them and God (Genesis 17:10-11)
    - a. Here God makes it plain what this token is about.
    - b. It is about circumcision of the males.
    - c. It is so much apart of the covenant that the word covenant appears six times in this passage (Genesis 17:9; 17:10, 11, 13 and 14).
    - d. Thus, the importance of circumcision is emphasized.
    - e. It is so important that failure to do so brought Divine judgment, of which we will note later.
  3. The sign in the precept (Genesis 17:11)
    - a. It was to be a token between God and Abraham.
    - b. Between God and Abraham’s seed.

4. The details of the precept (Genesis 17:12-13)
  - a. When the male child was eight days old.
  - b. *“Every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger... must needs be circumcised.”*
    - (1) This was directed by God and was compulsory. No exceptions.
    - (2) The time of circumcision was very important as well.
      - (a) Two serious problems are present in circumcision—bleeding and infection.
      - (b) Medical authorities have discovered that on the eighth day of the newborn male child, the blood clotting and infection fighting agents in the blood are at their combined best. The word of God was way ahead of science, for the fact was not discovered until the 1940’s. However, the word of God reported it approximately 4,000 years ago.<sup>1</sup>
5. The warning in the precept (Genesis 17:14)
  - a. *“And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people...”*
  - b. *“he hath broken my covenant.”*
    - (1) The warning is of God’s judgment upon those of Abraham’s seed who were not circumcised.
    - (2) Note: Lack of circumcision did not result in one’s loss of salvation; for, circumcision did not save.
    - (3) This judgment was one of two things.
      - (a) The exclusion from temporal blessings of the covenant (i.e. being excluded from the people and blessings of the covenant).
      - (b) The penalty of death
        - i. This is seen in the events of the life of Moses.
        - ii. Moses finds himself delinquent in circumcising one of his boys just prior to returning to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel (Exodus 4:24-26).
          - 1) In the context Moses’ life is threatened by God for not keeping the commandment.
          - 2) It seems that Zipporah had opposed keeping this command up to this point.
          - 3) It is only after this occurrence, does Zipporah herself perform the operation and claims what a *“bloody husband art thou to me”* of Moses. (Exodus 4:25-26).

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<sup>1</sup> Analytical Bible Expositor, volume 1, Genesis-Exodus by John G. Butler, pg. 153.

III. THE POSTERITY IN THE COVENANT (Genesis 17:15-21)

- A. The Mother of the Posterity (Genesis 17:15-16, 19)
  - 1. The naming of Sarai
    - a. Changed by God from Sarai
    - b. To Sarah – (meaning *Princess*)
  - 2. To be blessed by God
    - a. To be given a son by God (Genesis 17:19; cp. Genesis 25:20-21; 1 Samuel 1:2, 5-7, 9-11, 17-18, 19-20).
    - b. A *“mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.”*
  
- B. The Mocking About the Posterity (Genesis 17:17-18)
  - 1. The action (Genesis 17:17)
    - a. *“Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed”*
    - b. Some may believe Abraham was marveling here rather than mocking, however, the verse after this one confirms otherwise.
  - 2. The unbelief (Genesis 17:17; Genesis 18:12-14)
    - a. *“Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old, and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?”*
    - b. In the next chapter Sarah will laugh at the idea of bearing a child when she is ninety years old.
  - 3. The alternate presented (Genesis 17:18)
    - a. That Ishmael might be the chosen one.
    - b. However, Abraham’s desire for Ishmael was not included in God’s plan.
      - (1) So many times, we want God to bless our “Ishmael” plans when His “Isaac” plans are so far better.
      - (2) Wanting “Ishmael” is the amendment program of the flesh which wants to negotiate with God rather than surrender completely to Him.
  
- C. The Mandate About the Posterity (Genesis 17:19-21)
  - 1. The rebuttal by God (Genesis 17:19)
    - a. In a strong and almost harsh manner, God comes back at Abraham in a very corrective mandate about who is going to be the heir in the covenant.
    - b. It is Isaac, not Ishmael, who will receive the covenant.
  - 2. The plan presented (Genesis 17:19-21)
    - a. The parent presented – *“Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son”*
    - b. The person of the covenant – *“Thou shalt call his name Isaac”*
      - (1) His name – meaning *“laughter”*

- (2) Certainly, there were times of laughter, some good and some bad connected to Isaac's birth.
- (3) Three times Scripture records laughter regarding Isaac's birth.
  - (a) Abraham laughed – Genesis 17:17
  - (b) Sarah laughed in unbelief – Genesis 18:12-15
  - (c) Sarah laughed with joy – Genesis 21:6
- c. The position of the son – *“I will establish my covenant with him...”*
  - (1) God makes it very clear that the promise seed is Isaac.
  - (2) The emphasis that God makes on Isaac is so strong that in verse 19 alone there are 6 times that there is a direct reference to Isaac. “A son,” “his,” “Isaac,” “him,” “his,” and another “him.”
- d. The presence of the son – *“Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year”*
- e. The prohibited son – *“And as for Ishmael...”* (Genesis 17:21)
  - (1) He would be blessed
  - (2) He would be fruitful
  - (3) He would be multiplied
  - (4) But the covenant would be with Isaac

#### IV. THE PERFORMING OF THE COVENANT (Genesis 17:22-27)

- A. The Abruptness of God's Closure (Genesis 17:22)
- B. The Promptness of Abraham's Performance (Genesis 17:23, 26)
  - 1. Twice in this passage we are told that Abraham performed God's command in the *“selfsame day.”*—This would refer to the same day that God spoke with him.
  - 2. This is a testimony to Abraham's quickness to obey God's command. (Psalm 119:60). – Punctual obedience brings the blessings of God.
  - 3. This obedience is a fruit of Abraham's faith (James 2:18)
  - 4. Abraham was justified by faith (Romans 4:1-25)
- C. The People in the Performance (Genesis 17:23-27)
  - 1. All that were in Abraham's house obeyed.
  - 2. Abraham at 99 years old
  - 3. Ishmael at 13 years old
  - 4. In the selfsame day
  - 5. All the men of his house