

The Lord Sealing His Covenant with Abraham

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Date: 22 October 2023

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Great to see you all this morning. If you have a Bible with you, we're continuing on in the book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 17 this morning.

If you have one of the church Bibles, or if you need one, they're at the back if you need one. And the church Bibles, I think, is page 17. So all chapter 17 on page 17.

So let me start at verse 1 of Genesis 17. When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, I am God Almighty.

Walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers. Abram fell face down and God said to him, as for me, this is my covenant with you.

You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram. Your name will be Abraham. For I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful.

[1 : 09] I will make nations of you and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.

To be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan where you are now an alien. I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you. And I will be their God. Then God said to Abraham, as for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.

This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you. The covenant you are to keep. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

For the generations to come, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner.

[2 : 16] Those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh will be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant. God also said to Abraham, as for Sarai, your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai.

Her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations. Kings of peoples will come from her.

And Abraham fell face down. He laughed and he said to himself, will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of 90?

And Abraham said to God, if only Ishmael might live under your blessing. And then God said, yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son and you will call him Isaac.

[3 : 23] I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. I will surely bless him.

I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of 12 rulers and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant, I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.

When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him. And on that very day, Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household and circumcised him as God told him.

Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised and his son Ishmael was 13. Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

Father, just as we come to your word now, would you, as Rob has already said, just open our hearts to you and would you speak into them by your Holy Spirit.

[4 : 39] We thank you for your goodness this morning, for being able to come together to praise you. And now as we come to hear your word, God, speak to us this morning.

Amen. Well, to be honest, when I was thinking about this morning and up to about a couple of hours ago, I had no idea how I was going to start off this morning and what to talk about.

And when I put on these pants this morning, I got them all on, got on the belt and everything, and then I just happened to put my hands in my back pocket, and I pulled out a funeral service Thanksgiving notice from about two years ago, from a funeral of someone.

And I just happened to be looking through it, and one of the songs actually caught my eye. And one of the verses really caught my eye, and it said, Oh, let me see your footmarks, and in them plant my own.

My hope to follow Julie is in your strength alone. Oh, guide me, call me, draw me, and uphold me to the end.

[5 : 54] And then in heaven, receive me, my Savior and my friend. And those words, they kind of, I looked at them and I thought, that kind of sums up what we've been looking at over the last, probably five or six weeks with the life of Abraham.

Abraham, that God has called Abraham. He's brought him out of this land, the land of his fathers in Haran and Ur, and he's brought him to this new land, the land that he says to Abraham, I will show you to this land of Canaan, and this land he's going to give to Abraham.

And Abraham follows God. He comes out of the land with all his possessions and all his family, and he comes to this land that God shows him here in Canaan.

And it is quite a journey. We come to this chapter now in 17, and it's, you know, it's 24, 25 years of a journey that he's been on with God. And God, he's been working slowly through Abraham's life.

And you see at this point now that the promise or the covenant that he's established with Abraham is about to be fulfilled. And so much so that he ends up changing both Abraham's and Sarai's name.

[7 : 18] He changes their names to Abraham and to Sarah. And he says, both of you, you, Abraham, are going to be the father of many nations, and Sarah, you're going to be the mother of nations.

And so the two of you, from you, there is going to be a son, this son, and you are to call him Isaac. And out of him, your descendants are going to flow, and you are going to be a great nation and a blessing and a light to all the other nations.

And so when we look at this chapter, there's a few things I see. But first of all, what you see, not simply just from this passage, but all the way along over those five or six chapters that we've looked at over the weeks, is that God stands by his covenant with his people.

And you see it especially here with Abraham. And you see that it takes time. God has been working with Abraham over the last 24, 25 years.

And it takes time often with God. God doesn't work usually in minutes or hours. It seems he often works with us in months and years and over long periods of times in our lives.

[8 : 40] But yet the fact is, God still stands by his covenant and the promises he makes to Abraham here. And he stands by them despite all Abraham's mistakes, despite Abraham's lack of belief.

And we've seen a couple instances where, you know, God brings Abraham into the land of Canaan. There's a famine. And what does Abraham do? He heads off down to Egypt and he lies about his wife, Sarai.

Or we saw a couple of weeks ago in chapter, just in the previous chapter, 16. And we saw Abraham, he had just heard from God that God says, I'm going to give you a son.

And Abraham and Sarah, they act on it. And they, instead of waiting for that front door to open, they head in through the window. And they try and they make a son through Hagar, Sarah's maidservant.

And they try to fulfill God's covenant to Abraham that way, through the window, rather than through waiting for God to open the front door.

[9 : 51] And similarly for us, that's what God does also. He stands by his covenant with us, despite all our mistakes.

And in light of the fact that it does, he fulfills his covenant over our whole lifetime. It's not something that he does in a twinkling of an eye. He does it over our whole lifetime.

And then the question is, I suppose, well, what is his covenant with us? Because we see here with Abraham, he establishes his covenant with Abraham. And he says, I'm going to give you a son. I'm going to give you as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. And I'm going to give you this land. I'm going to give you this land to all your descendants. And you're going to be able to live here.

And I suppose, how does, you know, what's God's covenant to us? How does it apply to us? And, you know, we see like generally probably most of us aren't of Jewish descent.

[10:52] We don't live in the land of Israel, in the land of Canaan. So what is his covenant with us? And he tells us in the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 31, God says that the time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

And this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and I will write it on their hearts.

I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother saying, know the Lord, because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more. And so that's what we see God's covenant with us is in the past.

He says, I will remember your wickedness no more. I'll remember your sins no more. I will forgive your sin. I will forgive your wickedness. And he puts that in this new covenant.

[12:09] He makes it us. He puts that to one side and he said, I won't remember all your hardness of heart towards me, your hatred of me. But I will forgive you and I will remember those things no more.

And instead of, he puts them to one side and he puts something else into our hearts. He says, I will put my law in your minds and I will write it on your hearts.

And so that's what God does to us. He doesn't simply cut off our sinful nature, our sin, and put it to one side and forget to replace it. He replaced it with something so much better.

He replaced it with his law, his goodness, and his love in our lives. And the way that he's able to do that is he gives us his spirit.

And we're told in the Gospel of John, Jesus is with his disciples. And his time is coming soon where he's about to go to the cross and to then eventually go to heaven.

[13:10] And he says he's going to be going away to his disciples. And he says, did I tell you the truth? It is for your good that I'm going away. Unless I go away, the counselor will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send him to you. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

He will not speak in his own. He will only speak what he hears. And so the Holy Spirit is given to us by God in this new covenant to speak truth and to guide us, he says here, into all truth.

That's what we have in this new covenant. The forgiveness of sin and the replacement of something much better. The Holy Spirit working in our lives and changing our hearts and guiding us into all truth.

And that's what we have been given. And we see that God stands by this covenant that he has given us. He works on us all through our lives.

[14:23] He gives us that Holy Spirit to shape and to mold us to become more like him. So we see God standing by his covenant.

But then we see also here in this passage, God seals his covenant with a sign down in verse. Verse 9 of Genesis 17.

God says to Abraham, as for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you.

The covenant you are to keep. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision. And this is why he says it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

And so here we see this was God's sign. The sealing of God's covenant with Abram came by this sign that Abram was to carry out on himself and on all those in his household.

[15:31] And it was a sign or a mark, a distinguishing mark to show that he and all his household were part and belonged to Yahweh, the God of Israel.

El Shaddai, he says here, you know, God says, I am God Almighty. You know, this is who we belong to. By being circumcised, I am saying I belong to God Almighty. I belong to Yahweh, El Shaddai, the one who is above all things. And a sign, it points to something. We see here, you know, it associates with something. Think of, you know, think of all the brands or logos you see in the world. And they're all pointing, they're trying to point to something. Like I remember growing up, you'd hear the words, so fresh it's famous. And what do you think of? You think, Pat the baker. You know, a slice pan's so fresh it's famous. [16:34] And as soon as I hear those words, I associate those words with a slice pan from Pat the baker. And in a similar way, the sign of circumcision was to associate the Israelites with God, with Yahweh, that I am part of him.

He is my God. And it was to, because there was all these other tribes around, the Girgashites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and all these different peoples. And they all had their own gods. And this was the mark to say that I am part, I belong to this God, the God of Israel, the God Yahweh. But also a sign, it does associate something and it points to something. But it also usually has a deeper meaning.

When you look at a logo or a brand, it's usually trying to point out something about that product or that company. It's pointing to a deeper meaning.

Like even with, you think of that phrase, so fresh it's famous. It's pointing to something. It's trying to show that that Pat the baker slice pan is really fresh. It's been only baked a couple hours ago and it's just arriving up in the van onto the supermarket shelves.

[17:56] And that's what it's trying to convey, a deeper meaning. It's not simply just words, but it's trying to show that this bread is the best bread you're ever going to have.

And similarly, circumcision was a sign that was pointing to something so much deeper. And we see that, you probably see it most clearly with the people of Israel.

In the book of Deuteronomy, you probably see it the most clearly. When Moses is talking to the people of Israel and he says about them in Deuteronomy 10, 16, he says, Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

And what you see with these, when he's talking to these people in Israel, he sees that they are stiff-necked towards God. They've hardened their hearts towards God.

They've said, you know, they've grumbled and complained. They said, God, if you'd only given us this bread or you've given us water, quail to eat or, you know, melons, the cucumbers, they were so good in Egypt and why have you brought us out into this desert, wilderness place?

[19:09] And Moses says to them, you need to circumcise your hearts. Think about what all the good things that God has given you. And instead, circumcise your hearts and cut off that grumbling and complaining that you have against God.

But also, Moses realizes as well when he's talking to those people, that those people cannot do it by themselves. They cannot circumcise their hearts by themselves.

And so he says to them a few chapters later in the book of Deuteronomy, he says, The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live.

And the fact of the matter is that the people, and it's the same for us today, could not circumcise their own hearts. They couldn't change their hearts to love God any more than a stone can become a turnip.

They could not do it by their own strength. And Moses shows them here. He says, The Lord your God will have to circumcise your hearts. He's the one who is going to have to do it.

[20:31] You can't do it by yourself. And you see that most probably clearly when you read through the Gospels, and you see especially the Pharisees. And they've kept all these laws.

And yet Jesus turns to them and he says, You tithe all this mint and dill and cumin. You keep all the smallest laws. And yet you don't love God.

You throw, you devour widows' homes. And you have no love and mercy towards God and towards God's people. And so the realization as human beings is that we cannot circumcise our own hearts.

And Moses, as Moses says, The Lord has to circumcise our hearts. And he talks about that in the book of Colossians. Paul talks about this very fact that God has to do it for us.

And he says, Colossians 2 verse 11. In him, so in Jesus, you were also circumcised.

[21 : 39] In the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, and raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.

And all of this is pointing to the fact that Christ has to do the circumcision for us.

We cannot do it by himself. We cannot do it by the hands of men. But the circumcision has to be done by Christ. And the way he is able to do that was by going to that cross.

He was able to take all that punishment for us, and he put it on the cross, and he bore it for our sin. And so Christ, he took our punishment for us.

But then we see how we have been buried with him in baptism, and raised with him through faith in the power of God.

[22 : 53] And in this covenant, that's what we see. You know, even a couple of weeks ago when the three girls were being baptized, that was what it was symbolizing. This fact that they are now being buried with Christ.

They're saying goodbye to the old sinful nature way. They don't want anything more to do with that. They want to be buried with Christ, and so be raised to newness of life with Christ.

And the way that that happens is through Jesus circumcising your hearts. He is the only one who can do it, who can circumcise your hearts.

But then finally we see Abraham's response. And Abraham's response is one that is full of surrender and obedience and submission.

And you see it in two different ways. You see it at the start of the chapter, back in verse 2. You see God appears to Abraham, and he says, I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless.

[24 : 00] I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers. And Abram's, what's his response? It says, Abram fell face down.

And we see Abram's attitude towards God is one of reverence. It's one of respect towards God. He realizes when God speaks, he needs to listen.

He needs to listen to what God is saying to him. But then also we see, not only his attitude, but also that's carried out in his actions.

And we see down in verse 23, it says, On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all those born in his household are bought with his money.

Every male in his household and circumcised him as God told him. Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised. And his son Ishmael was 13. Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day.

[25 : 02] And every male in Abram's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him. And so what you see with Abraham is he didn't have just simply an attitude, Oh, yeah, sure, I'll do it sometime.

He obeyed right away. And, you know, we often say to our kids, you know, Obey right away. Try to, you know, you need to not do it tomorrow or something.

If I ask you to go clean your room, I expect you to go do it right away. And if they go and do that right away, that's a sign of respect and reverence and love for you as well.

And so when we see Abraham right away, he goes and he circumcises himself and all his household, it's a sign of, I love you, God, and I respect you, and I want to walk with you and follow you.

And our response similarly must be the same. Our attitude must be similar to that of Abraham. And we're told in the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 10, verse 19, the writer says, And that's the attitude we have is we can draw near to God and we have this full assurance of faith that we can come to him anytime, day or night, with whatever is on our heart.

[26 : 53] But our attitude is also one where we have a sincere heart. We're not coming to God and laughing and joking and, you know, being merry and everything. We come to God and realize that he is El Shaddai, God Almighty, and that he is a God who deserves respect, but also a God who is willing to listen to us at whatever time and whatever is on our hearts.

So we have our attitude like that, but also then we are called to obey as Abraham did here. And in a similar way, God says to Abraham, he says, Walk before me and be blameless.

And he says to us the same thing. He says, Walk before me and be blameless. He says, Come and listen to the words that I'm speaking and hear what I'm saying.

And just as Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit to his disciples and saying, He will come, he will guide you into all truth. You know, that's what we have today is the Lord.

He guides us into all truth. He guides us and shows us the way of how to walk blamelessly, of how to walk close to him and before him.

[28 : 15] And so that's my desire for us each here this morning, is that when we hear from God, when we come to him and talk to him, that when he responds to us, when he talks to us through his word, that we would walk close to him and that we would be blameless, that we would be obedient to what he says to us in his word.

And so we're called to be obedient, but we are obedient in light of the fact that God always stands by his covenant and his promises with us.

He always keeps his promises. He always will fulfill them. And they may take time. They may take a whole lifetime. But we have that assurance that he will finish what he started.

Remember in Philippians, that verse, he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. And so we do not obey and respond in obedience to God for the sake of it. We do it knowing that he is going to stand by his promises to us and that on that day of Christ Jesus, he will complete that work in us.

[29 : 36] And we look forward to that day. But for now, we surrender to him as Abraham did. Abraham wasn't going to be around when Israel in 400 years, when the Israelites would come out of Egypt.

But he was looking forward, it says in Hebrews 2, the heavenly city. And so we look forward to the heavenly city also. And so that's why we walk in obedience to God, because he stands by his promises, and he will bring us through all true life's struggles and ups and downs.

And on that, on him, we can depend. Let's pray. Let's pray.