

# Covenant Promises & Provisions

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Date: 28 June 2026

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[0:00] Good morning. Please turn in your Bibles with me to Genesis 17, our sermon text for today. If you don't have a Bible, you're welcome to take one off the back table and keep it as our gift to you.

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to 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.

Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 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.

I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 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.

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.

[1:15] And God said to Abraham, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you, throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 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, 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. 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. And God said to Abraham, As for Sarah your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her.

[2:24] I will bless her, and she shall become nations. Kings of people shall come from her. 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? And Abraham said to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. God said, No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.

I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly.

He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year. When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

Then Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all those born in his house or brought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house. And he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him.

[3:32] Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, and Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

That very day, Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised, and all the men of his house, those born in the house and those brought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Heavenly Father, we come before you one more time, because we acknowledge that everything that we're here for our aims, our goals, and gathering as a body and hearing from your word are things that we can't actually do. We can't do them in our strength. Lord, in the workplace, we have objectives that we're seeking to accomplish, that we have some measure of control over, but we're after transformed hearts. We're after faith being awakened and grown. We're after life change that comes through sanctification. God, all of that is the work of your spirit. And so we are utterly dependent on your spirit this morning to illuminate this truth so that we actually understand it rightly, and then to take that truth and apply it to our hearts so that we actually grow in faith, which is the point that you made us, Lord.

[4:53] So we come before you dependently, but also expectantly, because this is the way that you have chosen to work in your people for the last 2,000 years, through the word of the gospel being preached.

So, Lord, work mightily this morning, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, good morning, church. I feel like I'm in the shadows here this morning. I hope you can see me a little bit.

My name's Mike, one of the pastors here, and we're just glad that you've joined us this morning. As Rob mentioned, this is going to be our last Sunday for now in the book of Genesis. We obviously have a number of chapters to go still.

We'll pick that up back in the fall, and we're going to be working through the Psalms. And so we actually sent out the schedule. It's in the weekly email, the schedule of the Psalms that's going to be preached. And we also would encourage you to be in the Psalms.

Be reading them. Be studying them. Be meditating on them. Let them fuel your prayers before the Lord. And then be praying for the men that are going to be preaching. Well, today's text, Genesis 17, it contains a divine speech that we just heard.

[5:55] And then it's followed by a human response. And that divine speech consists of a preamble followed by three distinct parts. And this preamble, this introductory portion of the speech, it naturally formed, like I just said, an introduction to what follows.

And so really, there's no better place for me to begin today than by simply diving straight into the text. And so if you haven't already, please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 17. The title of today's sermon is Covenant Promises and Provisions.

Covenant Promises and Provisions. And as Brittany just read, the text begins, When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram.

Now, real quick, just for some context, for those that may not have been here, and as a reminder, do you all remember how old Abram was when he departed from Haran after God's original call? Anybody remember? Remember? 75. Yes, in chapter 12, verse 4, we learn Abram is 75 years old when God calls him. And do you remember how old he was when Hagar bore Ishmael to him?

[7:03] If you need a hint, just look at the previous verse, the end of chapter 16. How old was he? 86 years old. And now he's 99. Okay? Called it 75. Ishmael's born at 86.

99 years old. 13 more years. 13 years have gone by. Still no promised land. Still no promised child. Right?

Abraham is waiting, waiting, waiting on the promises. And it's been 24 whole years. But now God appears once again to Abram.

And God says to Abram, 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.

Then Abram fell on his face. Now here's the first point and really the introduction to the sermon. Covenant relationship with God requires right vision of his proper place in ours.

[8:03] Covenant relationship with God requires right vision of his proper place in ours. God calls Abram here to walk before me and be blameless. Now these words, they point straight back to Noah, who Moses said in chapter 6, verse 9, was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.

Noah walked with God. And Noah had done so just like his forefather Enoch. If you remember, Enoch walked with God and then he was not, for God took him.

God is calling Abram, is one commentator, writes, to live his life before God in such a way that every single step is made with reference to God and every day experiences him close in hand.

And I want to ask, what is the basis that God gives for this ordering of Abram's life? What's the basis? I am God Almighty.

I am God Almighty. That's the foundation. In Hebrew, it's El Shaddai. I am the all-sufficient one, the all-powerful one. I am the one who from nothing created all things by my very word.

[9:12] God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, as we said in Deuteronomy 10, 17. God is the creator. We are creatures.

God is king. We are subjects and citizens in his kingdom. God is Lord, and we are vassals in his state. And this reality is reflected in the text, not only in the words that God uses, but the fact that God is the one who initiates the conversation.

God is the one who concludes the conversation. Look at verse 22. It says, when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Abraham, he opens and closes the conversation because he is God Almighty.

And church, we must have this right vision of God's proper place in ours, who God is, and who we are before him if we are to have a relationship with him.

But you know, our culture, our culture says, no, that's oppressive. Right? If we have to do what God says, then we don't want God. We will be our own gods. We will do whatever we want to do.

[10:20] We'll do whatever makes us feel good. We'll each decide for ourselves what truth is. And you know, as long as your truth doesn't interfere with my truth, then we're all good.

Like, this is what our culture proclaims. But the second you start asserting some absolute truth, it's, nah, get that out of here. That's unloving. That's even hateful.

And church, think about this. Meanwhile, God, by his sustaining grace and power, upholds their very lives. The reason that their heart, I'm talking culture out there and us in here, the reason our hearts take another beat is because of God.

The reason our lungs draw another breath is because of God. He's ordered this universe according to his will, and so he decides how it operates.

But he's done so, now listen to this, okay? He's done so, as we've seen over and over again in Genesis, in love and for the good and the flourishing of humanity.

[11:22] And he desires, as we've seen from the very beginning, he desires relationship with his image bearers, those who were made with his divine stamp. He wants a relationship with them.

But those image bearers need to remember the proper order. He is God. God, we are not. And so what do we do? Well, like Abram, we fall on our faces in worship and then we heed his every word. That's what Abram does. That's why the chapter starts like this. This is the preamble to everything that follows. And that humble posture, face down in worship, in reverence before the Lord, that humble posture is the soil out of which grows a vibrant covenant relationship with God.

At the preaching workshop, we had a gathering of about 12 men for the preaching workshop Monday. And we looked at this passage in Isaiah 66. These verses hit me over the head this past week when I was in them.

Thus says the Lord, Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What is the house that you would build for me? And what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord.

[12:35] Pause there for a second. Temple in Jerusalem was built by Solomon. Beautiful.

Amazing. It made the disciples in awe. Even the rebuilt lesser temple made the disciples in awe.

And God is saying, what is this house that you're going to contain me? And this is how Solomon prayed when he built the temple. Like, Lord, we built this amazing thing, but you're God. Are you going to dwell here?

You know, if you've been to Europe, you've seen massive cathedrals. We have some in New London, right? Stanglatswood. Beautiful. God is the king of the universe. Is he going to be contained in that little temple and that little church built by men?

That's what he's saying. Are you going to contain me? But wait, this is where I'm going here. This is what he says next. But this is the one to whom I will look. He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Do you catch that? Your lofty cathedrals, palaces, temples, whatever, they're not going to contain me, but I will dwell with the humble and the one who trembles at my word.

[13:44] So that's my introduction to today's sermon. It's the preamble. It's the preamble. God establishes covenant relationship with those who have a right vision of his proper place in ours.

And now after this preamble with Abraham bowing before the Lord, God's speech proceeds and it does so in three different parts. Okay? And so you have from verse three to eight, God changes Abraham's name to Abraham and then he confirms and expands the covenant promises that we've been talking about.

And then in the second part, like the rainbow to God's covenant with Noah, God gives circumcision as the sign and seal of the Abrahamic covenant. And then in the third part, God changes Sarai's name to Sarah and then he confirms and expands the covenant promises.

Okay? So I think there's these three parts here. In the middle is this call to Abraham to keep the covenant, the sign of circumcision. But on the outside, right, that middle part is sandwiched on both sides by grace and promise.

And so I think the very structure of the speech, it helps to convey what I think is the main message. And I'm going to use an analogy to articulate today's main point. And so here it is. Kids, this is a little different than what's in your sheets.

[14:58] I simplified it a bit. This is what I think the message is proclaiming, okay? As a fount to the stream, so are God's covenant promises to his people's obedience.

Okay? God's covenant promises are the fount. And out of that flows the obedience, the holiness of his people. We're going to unpack this. Now we're not going to work through this divine speech verse by verse.

It's a long chapter. But instead we're going to draw principles from it about how God relates to his covenant people. Okay? And we're going to come back to that. God relates to his covenant people by giving them, now here's the first thing we see, a new identity.

A new identity. God says to Abram in verses 4 and 5, Behold, my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 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. And we talked before how the name Abram, it means exalted father. And Abraham sounds like father of a multitude.

[16:08] And so God here is giving Abraham a new identity and that new identity is in connection with God and with the covenant that God is establishing with him. So from here on out in the Genesis narrative, he is Abraham.

He's Abraham, the father of a multitude of nations. And so naturally, the patriarch of Israel, the one through whom all nations would be blessed, he gets a new identity.

But so too does the matriarch, Sarai. So look down in verses 15 and 16. As for Sarai, your wife, God says, you should not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.

I will bless her and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her and she shall become nations. Kings of peoples shall come from her. The name Sarai and Sarah both have the same meaning of princess.

And so her name change is not really about the meaning of the name itself. It's the identity associated with that name. So just like Abraham, Sarah is now given a new identity in connection with God and his covenant promises.

[17:11] She was probably named based on her family line and their pagan background. She's being renamed something in connection with the Lord and her purpose under God's covenant.

And we need to see Abraham and Sarah here as a, and I think we've mentioned this, but they are a new kind of Adam and Eve. Right? They are to be living under God's rule and blessing as the people of God.

That's what's going on. They're new Adam and Eve and everyone that comes after them in that line is to be God's people living under God's rule and blessing. And I want to ask saints, has anybody here been given a new identity like Abraham and Sarah?

Yeah. Therefore, Paul says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. If you are in Christ this morning, brothers, sisters, if you are in Christ, you may not have been given a new name.

If anyone has, I want to hear that story. But you may not have been given an actual new name, but you have a new identity. You are now, you were once an enemy, weak, ungodly, sinners, Romans 5.

[18:19] But now you are a friend of God like Abraham. You are a child of God like Jesus himself. So I want to say, brothers and sisters, you might feel at times like you don't belong.

Even in this space, you might feel like you don't belong here. You might feel like an outcast in the family of God, but you need to know this in connection with Christ and the new and better covenant in his blood through the cross and the resurrection, God Almighty, El Shaddai, he has bestowed upon you a glorious new identity.

He's given you a place in his family and as Isaiah says in Isaiah 56, 5, he's given you an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. That's what you've been given by God through Christ.

God relates to his covenant people by giving them a new identity. Now second, by giving them amazing, oh, I wasn't supposed to show them all at the same time. Oh well. There they are.

Suspense gone. Giving them amazing promises. Don't read them yet. Now, in many ways, all of God's promises to Abraham are contained in that original call back in Genesis 12, 1 through 3.

[19:35] Okay, and those are our new memory verses. We might just keep the ones we've got for the summer and we can all work on the three that we've got. But Genesis 12, 1 through 3, the pivotal call of God to Abraham which sets in motion the rest of redemption of history.

All the promises are really contained there in a micro form. But we've been seeing over the last few chapters that God has been gradually unfolding and then expanding on these promises.

And this chapter in particular, the promises, as Gordon Wenham describes, he says, the promises are repeated and filled out in a glorious crescendo.

Now, I don't know about you, but I am pumped for 250th anniversary 4th of July fireworks. Okay? Especially the grand finale at the end. But the thing is that those fireworks are going to seem like a puny handheld sparkler compared to the crescendo of covenant promises that we see here in Genesis 17.

And so I want you, we're going to walk through these promises here one at a time pretty quickly though. But these are the promises that God is giving to Abram. And you can probably find more in the passage, but I identify these 10 as sort of the key ones.

[20:47] God says in verse 6, I will make you exceedingly fruitful. What does this remind you of? Creation language. Right? This is God's charge to Adam and Eve.

Reiterated, after the flood to Noah and his sons, be fruitful and multiply, God said. And he's saying to Abraham, I'm going to ensure the fulfillment of that creation mandate, that creation purpose.

This is a sign of blessing. God's blessing is in the fulfillment of his purpose. God says in verse 6, also, I will make you into nations. Okay, before in chapter 12, God says that I will make of you a great nation.

Singular. Now God says, I will make you into nations. Plural. But that's not all. Because then he says that kings shall come from you.

Kings shall come from your line. So again, this is an expansion on the prior promises. Now we've already seen, especially in chapter 14, that Abraham has been pictured in many ways like a king ruling over his nomadic kingdom.

[21:52] But God is saying now that from his offspring will arise kings of nations. God promises to Abraham, I will be God to you and your offspring forever.

And this is the heart of the covenant. I will be God to you and your offspring forever. This is the first time we see this language here, but it will be repeated over and over and over and over again for the rest of Scripture.

The rest of the covenant promises really are worthless apart from this one. If God is not God to them, then what is all the rest of it? It's useless. God made, we saw in the creation account, God made Adam and Eve to dwell in his presence.

He made this garden temple of Eden and there God would dwell with Adam and Eve. He would be their God. They would be his people. They would walk with him in the garden. But that reality was severed by sin.

God is declaring the restoration of that divine human relationship. I am bringing that about through Abraham and Sarah, through the promises. I will be God to you and your offspring forever.

[23:02] I will give you the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. The land promise is again reiterated and at this we recall how back in chapter 15 that promise was specifically tied to that weird covenant inauguration ceremony where God passed between the animal parts.

You remember that? God was demonstrating that he would unilaterally of himself bring the promises to pass. The land promise in particular but all the promises. Number six, he says, I will be their God.

And so he reiterates the most important promise of them all emphasizing the covenant relationship that he will have with Abraham, Sarah, and all of their offspring.

I mean, those are some amazing fireworks, right? But the show doesn't end there. It's just a brief interlude. It picks back up when God addresses Sarah down in verse 16 or talking about Sarah to Abraham.

He says, I will bless Sarah. Now Abraham and Sarah, they're one flesh. They're husband and wife. And so the covenant promises applied to Abraham inherently involve Sarah, but they doubted that reality, didn't they?

[24 : 12] Just a chapter ago. They tried to take marriage into their own hands. Sarah gave Abraham Hagar. God is making it clear, no, Sarah, Sarah to your wife, the one that you're one flesh with.

She will be blessed by God. And here's how you're going to know because I'm going to give you a son by her. Not by Hagar, by her, by your wife who's 90 years old.

I'm going to give you a son by her. She shall become nations and kings shall come from her. And so the promises of kings and of nations made to Abraham, they're reiterated to Sarah.

So count these 10, 10 lofty promises made to Abraham and Sarah. And then we see Abraham has another one of those, I believe, help my unbelief kind of moment.

Look at verse 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?

[25 : 12] Seems like a good question. Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child? And Abraham said to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. And I love God's response.

He says, But Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring.

And then in verse 21, God finally, after 24 years of waiting, can you imagine waiting 24 years? I can't wait like a day for things. 24 years of waiting. God gives Abraham a timeline.

He says, Isaac will be born at this time next year. puts a time frame on it. And God affirms in verse 20, and Rob talked about this from chapter 16, God affirms the blessing, blessing will come to Ishmael, but the line of promise, the covenant, is through Isaac.

Now I want to ask, have these promises been fulfilled? Like, has God made good on his word?

When Moses is writing this, many of these promises have been fulfilled in a small part.

[26 : 24] But we have the great advantage of looking back over another 3,500 years of history. Right? And we today are able to see how these very promises given by God have been fulfilled in Israel's history and especially have been fulfilled or will be fulfilled in the person of Christ.

Christ. And just, I want to, you can do an exercise this week and look at each of these and trace them through the Bible. I don't think that would be wasted time. I'll talk about a couple of these. Was Israel, was Abraham exceedingly fruitful?

Israel was indeed fruitful and multiplied. We see this in Exodus chapter 1. They became an exceedingly great nation like the dust of the earth and the stars in the heavens. And now, church, through Jesus Christ, people from every tribe, tongue, language, and nation are given a new identity and are flooding into the one people of God.

It's like how the nations right now are pouring into North America to watch the World Cup. The nations are streaming into the people of God. What about this, I will make you into nations and kings shall come from you?

Right? That we actually see literal, physical nations descending from Abraham. Not just Israel, but the Midianites, the Edomites, other nations. And then kings of those nations, right?

[27 : 47] Including Israel's own line of kings. We read about that in the history books of the Bible. But the king, Jesus Christ, right? The king of kings, the Lord of lords.

He has come from the line of Abraham and he has inaugurated his heavenly kingdom. And we see that nations who were once far off, that includes us in here.

Nations once far off have been brought near by the blood of King Jesus. They have become sons and daughters of Abraham. And church, by that same blood, God becomes our God and we his people.

God makes his dwelling place with us. We read in the epistles the epistles that each individual believer becomes a temple of the living God.

If you are in Christ Jesus, you are a temple of the living God. God is making his home in your heart. And we also read that the church, likewise, is described as a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. [28:53] Church, this is the ultimate firework show. The promises of God given to his people over history. It's a display of the overwhelming and unthinkable grace of God to bring these lofty and amazing promises to us.

Now, we can add to this list of promises, can't we? As the church, we can add to this list of promises. So I want to ask you, what other promises, and we've done this in the past already, as we look over and over again at God's promises, what other promises has God given to us, his saints? Think about it. What does the New Testament have to say? How about how God is faithful to forgive your sins if you confess them to him?

1 John 1, 9. That's a promise that God gives to the saints. Or how Christ has made you perfect forever by his once-for-all sacrifice on the cross, Hebrews 10, 14. Perfect forever, once for all, by the blood of Jesus.

How about the same promise he gave to Israel, how God will never leave you or forsake you? That's a promise given to the saints. If you are in Christ, God will never leave you or for he is your God, you are his people.

[30:06] How about how nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord, Romans 8, 39. We could go on. How about how God is working all things for your good or how he will complete the work that he started in you and present you blameless on the day of Christ Jesus?

How about how God is preparing his bride, the church, for that future wedding day when Jesus and the church will be joined together in perfection? How about how every form of sin and suffering will flee from the presence of God when Christ returns and we're going to dwell in unending joy in his presence with one another?

That's a promise of God that we see, Revelation 21 and 22. Friends, these are the lofty, the amazing promises that we are given in Christ.

It's a cosmic firework display. And I want you to think about this for a second. All the promises that we just talked about, they constitute what is ultimate reality.

What is ultimate reality? And here's what I mean. Those promises are more real, they're more durable, they're more lasting, they're more solid than all of the circumstances of your life. Okay?

[31:24] All the circumstances, the things that we can see and hear and taste and touch and smell, those promises are more real. They're more real. The pleasures of this world that we grasp after are like clouds.

Okay? You try to get them and then they're gone. Just a silly example, but I have a bunch of soccer jerseys because I used to be into soccer jerseys and one of them has, it's a Germany jersey and he doesn't even play for Germany anymore.

I was wearing the jersey and I looked up like, does this guy still play for them? No. Like we buy things and then they're outdated. Okay? Because on and on this time, time is marching on and on. The pleasures of this world, they never actually leave us satisfied.

Okay? Our houses are amazing, but they break down and they consume our time. Our cars, the same thing. Promotion at work ends up being way more stressful than you wanted it to be.

Right? The pleasures of this world, they leave us looking for more. They're sinking sand. These promises and the promises that we have in Jesus Christ are more real, more lasting. They are solid rock.

[32:26] Not just the pleasures, but the pains of this life. As difficult as they are. And they are difficult. We endure all kinds of trials.

Whether it's financial crises or health crises or relational difficulty or mistreatment, whether it's at work or in a home relationship. all the pains of this life that we experience, they're temporary and they're fleeting in comparison to the weight of glory that is coming for us saints.

And so here's the thing, that we need to be clinging to the promises of God in the midst of the pleasures and the pains of life, things that are going to pass away because these are lasting and eternal.

Clinging to the promises. Now we use that phrase a lot. What does it even mean? What does it mean to cling to the promises? Well, one thing it certainly means is that you need to go to them in the word.

You need to pray into them. Wrestle the words of scripture into your heart and life. God's not just going to whack you over the head with promises. You've got to go. You've got to grab them. [33 : 35] You've got to wrestle them into the nitty gritty of your life by working them into the circumstances of your life until you realize in your heart by the spirit these things are more real and more lasting than what I'm facing right now.

God, I trust you. I trust that this is real. I trust that you are going to bring me home one day and Christ is going to come and we're going to be with you in glory and that is my ultimate reality. Not the stuff that I'm facing before me.

Real though it is, that's more real. Praise God. Now these promises provide the basis, the motivation for God's covenant people to live out a life of obedience.

And so, in Genesis 17, sandwiched between these two speeches of covenant promises is this speech about covenant provisions. By provision, I just mean things that people have to do.

They're obligations or stipulations. Things we must do. God gives that to Abraham. And so the next thing God gives to his covenant people are covenant signs and obligations.

[34 : 38] Now God had already imposed an obligation in the preamble when he said, walk before me and be blameless that I may make my covenant between me and you. Now God says, look down at verse 9, as for you, Abraham, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

Now we've seen this language before. This covenant sign language. Does anybody remember?

The covenant with Noah, right? The other passage that we were working on, Genesis 9, 12 through 15, in God's covenant with Noah, he provided a sign.

What was that sign? A rainbow. Yes, we love rainbows. Rainbows are awesome. We saw one last week. Double rainbow actually. It was amazing from the leech's backyard. The rainbow symbolizes the mercy of God after judgment.

It symbolizes how he was committed to never again flood the earth and now we have a new covenant, right? The Abrahamic covenant. A new sign and seal is given.

[35 : 50] The sign of circumcision which is the cutting off of the male foreskin as we're told here. Now the rainbow which probably already existed was repurposed by God as a covenant sign.

Now similarly, circumcision already existed. It was actually already practiced widely in the ancient Near East. God is repurposing it as a covenant sign. See, for the surrounding nations that practice circumcision, it was more of a social right.

Sometimes it was used to even distinguish priests, but it was a social right. For Israel, it would be a religious right. And he's saying that it needs to be performed eight days after birth.

But whereas the rainbow was a sign purely of God's initiative, who brings out the rainbow? Right? God does. When I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow is seen in the clouds, God's the one who does that.

Circumcision is not so much that, is it? Right? It requires initiative on the part of Abraham and his offspring. God is not going to supernaturally perform the procedure.

[36 : 55] So active obedience is required. God is calling the covenant community towards active obedience. He wants them to demonstrate their faith and their commitment to him.

And so serious is this covenant obligations. Look at verse 14. God warns, 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. I love how this one commentator, Victor Hamilton, he puts it like this. Here is the choice. Be cut or be cut off.

That's the warning that God gives. Now this covenant sign of circumcision, it would be a perpetual reminder that God's people, which includes not just ethnic Israel but also foreigners that are joined to Israel, they are being marked off for God and that's what the reminder would be.

I am marked off for the Lord. I am consecrated. That becomes an important word in Exodus. I'm consecrated. That is, I'm made holy, set apart, made distinct for the Lord who's promised to be their God.

[38 : 07] Right? It's a declaration. I belong to God. I'm committed to love him and to serve him above all else and my identity is found in God and in his covenant people.

That's what this is. And so what does Abraham do? He's given the sign and the obligation of circumcision and what does he do? The last portion of the chapter, we see that that very day, Abraham performs the covenant sign of circumcision and here's the third and last point here. God's covenant people respond in holy obedience. God's covenant people respond in holy obedience. So with the promises of God as the fount, the source, right?

God's grace, God's faithfulness, the things that he has promised to Abraham, Abraham responds in a stream of holy obedience. Now remember, we're told here Abraham is 99 years old.

Ishmael, poor guy, is 13 years old. And together with all the men of the household, they received the sign of circumcision. Okay? That probably hurt.

[39:21] I received it as a baby boy. Don't remember that. They definitely remember this. This was a painful thing that they did in obedience to the Lord based on his word and promises.

God's grace, God's faithfulness. And so we see that Abraham, just like his father Noah, he does everything the Lord commands here in this chapter, right? He's obeying the Lord. So therefore, Abraham's obedience is the basis for God's covenant with him, right?

That's why God enters in the covenant with Abraham because he's obedient. He's perfect, right? No, right? He's not. He's not. We've actually seen time and again Abraham fall into sin.

His faith waver. Now we talked about this reality a couple weeks ago in that covenant inauguration ceremony when I quoted from chapter 17 and I introduced the tension that exists in this narrative and up until the coming of Jesus Christ.

And so I'll ask the question that I asked then. Is the Abrahamic covenant unconditional or conditional? is it unconditional because we saw God pass between He put Abraham to sleep.

[40:34] He passed between the animal parts. He said, I'm going to fulfill my word. Chapter 17, walk before me and be blameless. Keep my covenant with you. Is it unconditional or conditional?

The answer is yes. Right? There's elements of both here and that doesn't really make sense. That doesn't compute. It can't, by definition, it can't be both. And we said, we already answered this back in chapter 15.

This is an unresolved tension in Scripture until Jesus Christ comes from heaven, takes on flesh, fulfills all of the conditions of this covenant and the law of Moses, dies on our behalf as the covenant curse that we were.

And then through his death and resurrection, he fulfills all the promises and secures all the promises that remain unfulfilled which God promised to unilaterally bring to pass.

That's amazing. In the light of the gospel today, we can look back and we can see with clarity what God was doing progressively in history. And friends, the source, the fount, is God and his grace and his faithfulness and his promises which always precede anything that we do.

[41:49] He chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, Paul says, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.

If you're in Christ, that's what has happened to you. You have been chosen before the foundation of the world. You have been predestined for adoption as a child of God. God's grace, God's faithfulness, the promises of God, the fount, the source.

And in this way, saints, the right of circumcision has been superseded. I know at EB we would always say OBE. It's been overcome by events. Okay? Circumcision is OBE.

In fact, we read the passage from Deuteronomy before. Circumcision was always meant to point to a greater spiritual reality. This is why Moses called Israel to circumcise the foreskin of your heart. Cut away the sin, the flesh, the idolatry that remains. Cut it away to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's what the physical circumcision was meant to point to, a heart circumcision.

[43:01] And that circumcision has been accomplished by the Spirit through faith in Jesus. We read from Colossians, it is a circumcision made without hands as we die to the flesh and are raised to newness of life in Christ.

And Paul reminds us in Romans 4 that the Abraham story actually foreshadowed that very message. Paul says in Romans 4, verse 11, that Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

You remember in chapter 15, it says that he believed in God and his faith was credited to him as righteousness. Now he's receiving the sign of circumcision. Why did God do it that way? So that the

purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised so that righteousness will be counted to them as well.

That's us, the ones who believe without, we don't have to be circumcised first. That's what the Galatian church was being told. You've got to be circumcised. You've got to become a Jew first to become a Christian.

Paul says, no, you don't. By faith in Jesus Christ, you're given a righteousness, an alien righteousness. It's not your own. And so just real quick, as a side note, to parents who may not realize this, you are not required to have your baby boy circumcised.

[44 : 26] It's not a scriptural requirement. It's been fulfilled. Okay? You might choose to do so for other reasons, but it shouldn't be because you believe God commands it. Heart circumcision by the Spirit, always the intent.

And now, in Christ, motivated by grace, we joyfully respond in a flow of holy obedience. We seek to live the distinct, the marked off lives of those who have already been given a new identity in Christ. And we're not just motivated. We're empowered. We're empowered by the Spirit through the gospel. He enables us. He empowers us to be who we already are in Christ. And so we come back to the main point here.

As a fount through the stream, so is God's covenant. So are God's covenant promises to His people's obedience. And I want to ask, are you drinking from the fount that will never run dry? Have you joined yourself to God through faith in Jesus Christ this morning? You were made for that. You were made for a covenant relationship with God. And until you have that, you will never be satisfied.

[45 : 39] You will keep chasing after thing, after thing, after thing. God made you for Himself. And the only way to be reconciled to Him is to repent of your sin and to believe in Jesus Christ.

And He gives you His righteousness and He reconciles you by faith to God, the purpose for which you were made. And if you want to know more about that, please come talk to me after the service. And saints, brothers and sisters, as those who are drinking from that fount eternally, this passage actually places a call on our lives. It places a call to live out the new lives that we have, to live lives of holy obedience to God.

As those marked off by Christ. Sometimes we think that the ethical call of God on the Old Testament saints of Israel is somehow lessened or removed in the gospel.

It's actually not. It's not. Jesus says, John 14, 15, if you love me, you will obey my commandments. Peter says, to Christians, as obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, so you also be holy in all your conduct since it is written, quoting Leviticus, you shall be holy for I am holy.

[46 : 54] As the redeemed saints, saved by grace, motivated by the gospel, empowered by the Spirit, right, the fount, the source in God, as those saints, we all the more are called to live holy, distinct lives.

And often this obedience involves some pain, like 99-year-old Abraham getting circumcised. It involves some pain. Now this pain can take a ton of different forms, right?

We think about the physical pain that our brothers and sisters experience right now in being persecuted for their faith all the time. They're enduring pain for the sake of Christ. But we also experience relational pain, right?

Maybe obedience to the Lord is requiring you to break off a relationship. Maybe it's requiring you to admit that you're wrong and ask for forgiveness. That usually hurts a little bit.

Maybe it's requiring you to simply absorb the offenses of others and cover it over in love. There's a cost there to that kind of obedience. There's also the day-in, day-out pain of putting our fleshly desires and appetites to death.

[48 : 07] Right? The desire to scroll a little bit longer, to click the bait that the algorithm sent you, to let the next YouTube video just play and play and play. The desire to take another drink, have another bite when you know that you shouldn't.

The desire to react in defensiveness and anger. Now the list goes on and on and on, but we're called to holy obedience that springs from the promises of God that we have in Christ.

You know, there's times in the Lucid House where Brittany or I will tell one of the kids what to do and the response is, believe it or not, I don't want to.

Okay. Well, that's maybe true. It may be true that you don't want to do the thing that you were just told to do, but God has called children to obey their parents in the Lord for this is right.

Not just when they want to, but no matter how they feel. Right? And kids, just as a word here, your parents are training you to obey not just them, not merely them, humans.

[49:15] They're training to obey God. It's His command, not our command. It's God's command. We're training our children to obey God in the future when we're not even there. And someday you might be in a situation where you're dating or engaged and it would make logical sense from a worldly perspective for you to just move in with a significant other.

Right? Less cost, less chaos. It will save a lot of money. You'll get to figure out if you compliment one another before committing to marriage. But God calls us to something different. Right?

There's a cost there. God says that that kind of intimacy is reserved for marriage. That's just an example of painful obedience. It requires us to put the flesh to death even when doing so doesn't make sense to us, to the world.

Why? Because we know that God's way is better. Why? Because God is creator and king and we are his subjects and his creatures. Why? Because we are filled with the gratitude of the gospel of grace that has come to us in the person of Christ.

Because we've been given precious promises and become partakers of the divine nature. When we are steeped in the gospel, the commands of God are not a burden. They're a joy.

[50:29] They're not a duty. They're a delight to the saints of God. Christians, God in unthinkable grace, he has entered into a covenant relationship with us through the blood of Christ.

He has set off this grand finale of promises that are being fulfilled now that will be fulfilled to come. That's the fount. And we then, out of gratitude with the power of the Spirit, we joyfully respond in holy obedience.

And that's the stream. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for this word, Lord. There's some confusing things in this text. But God, I'm thankful that you show us what it means even by giving us the New Testament in which your authors in the New Testament were enlightened by the Spirit to know.

And God, we see so clearly through the gospel of Jesus Christ the limitless grace, the unthinkable mercy. God, it is a fount that never runs dry.

You are a fount that never runs dry. Lord, help us not to get the gospel backwards and to think that we need to do in order to live. No, the gospel says, the new covenant says, come to me by faith and then in my power live out the commands that I have given you.

[51:47] Lord, we thank you for that. God, help us to go from here filled with your power in light of the promises you've given us to be the people that you've called us to be. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. Amen.