

# GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

## The Mark of the Covenant – Genesis 17

### Context:

*“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram ...” (Gen. 17:1a)*

\_\_\_\_\_ years ago, God made a great promise to Abram (and implicitly to Sarai as well).

Not fully \_\_\_\_\_ (or at least not \_\_\_\_\_) how/what God would do to fulfill that promise, they chose an ill-advised, short-sighted, and costly ‘shortcut’ that would affect them and their forbears forever.

Abram and Sarai’s ‘shortcut’ to God’s promise to them has cost them \_\_\_\_\_ years. That’s a long detour from experiencing God’s blessing and seeing God at work. But remember the \_\_\_\_\_ of promise God made to Abram. It’s guarantor was \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 15:17-18, Hebrews 6:13)

### Covenant renewed:

Now God \_\_\_\_\_ graciously revisits his covenant promise with Abram and Sarai:

*“I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, <sup>2</sup> that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” (1b-2)*

What is God telling Abram about Himself?

Marcus Dods writes,

*“I am able to fulfill the awesome hopes that I have set before you of a people and a land. There is no need to let go of the promise because of your old age. There is no need to succumb to passive desperation. There is no need to scale down the promise to match your puny thoughts—no need to resort to fleshly expedience—no need of trying to fulfill the promise in any second-rate way. Everything—all your life, all your future—lies in this: I am God Almighty!” (The Book of Genesis, pp. 161)*

What is God telling Abram about Abram?

Benno Jacob writes,

*If you want to become whole, which is my request for you, you must walk before me; you must place yourself under my exclusive supervision, guidance, and protection. The image is taken from the shepherd who walks behind his herd directing it by his calls (48, 15), or from the father under whose eyes the child walks. It is more than the walking “with” God of Enoch and Noah who were practically led by the hand.*

When questions arise you shall take directions only from God and be devoted to him without reservation. This word does not refer to moral conduct, for that would be too insignificant in this situation and is self-understood. The high demand corresponds to God's, "Be you mine, and I will be yours." (First Book of the Bible, pp. 109–10)

Abram's response?

Then Abram fell on his face. (3a)

After Abram humbles himself before God, God \_\_\_\_\_ the promise and \_\_\_\_\_ his name:

And God said to him, <sup>4</sup> "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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." (17:3b-8)

No longer " \_\_\_\_\_ father, but father of a \_\_\_\_\_ "

Not just a "multitude", but a multitude of \_\_\_\_\_

Not just a vast people, but a \_\_\_\_\_ people

And a reiterated "everlasting"

**"As for you ..."** – The mark of the renewed covenant:

<sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> 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, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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." (9-14)

The mark of the covenant fits the \_\_\_\_\_ of the covenant:

- It's \_\_\_\_\_.
- It's \_\_\_\_\_.
- It was meant to define those who are \_\_\_\_\_ to God and \_\_\_\_\_ those who are not.
- Most of all, it serves as a \_\_\_\_\_ of God's sovereignty and our need to trust Him!

## And Sarai, too ...

<sup>15</sup> And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup> 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."

<sup>17</sup> 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?" <sup>18</sup> And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

<sup>22</sup> When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought 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. <sup>24</sup> Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup> And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup> That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. <sup>27</sup> And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. (15-27)

And yet – in spite of all that has taken place – Abraham still has \_\_\_\_\_!

Still suffering the same spiritual condition before – doing God's will in his own way – Abraham asks God to substitute \_\_\_\_\_ into this role.

Why was that not possible?

God reiterates the expanded promise to Abraham and Sarah, and now extends a promise to Ismael as well.

But to his credit, Abraham does the most important thing: He \_\_\_\_\_.

## Does God want us to be circumcised today?

Deuteronomy 30:6

Romans 2:28-29

Colossians 2:11

Next week: **Abraham and the Three Messengers**