

Summary of Genesis 17

A few weeks ago we were introduced to the life of Abraham (Abram). Abraham is by far the most important figure in Genesis. We noted that the Tower of Babel event in Genesis 11 was the immediate context for his life in the story of Genesis to “Reverse-the-Curse”. Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldeans, near the scene of the crime at Babel. Here is a recap of Abraham’s life as recorded in Genesis:

1. **Call of Abram** (12:1-3) – age 75
2. Journey of Abram to Canaan (12:4-9)
3. Famine and travel to Egypt (12:10-20)
4. Abram and Lot settle the land (13:1-18)
5. Abram goes to war to rescue Lot (14:1-24)
6. **God ratifies His covenant with Abram** (15:1-21)
7. Sarai gives Hagar to Abram (16:1-15) – age 85-86
8. **God calls for circumcision of Abram and offspring** (17:1-27) – age 99
9. Isaac is promised to Abraham and Sarai (18:1-21)
10. Sodom and Gomorrah are judged (18:22-19:38)
11. Abraham encounters Abimelech (20:1-18)
12. Isaac is born (21:1-34) – age 100
13. **Abraham offers up Isaac** (22:1-24)
14. Sarah dies and is buried (23:1-20) – age 137
15. Rebekah is chosen as Isaac’s wife (24:1-67) – age 140
16. Abraham dies and is buried (25:1-11) – age 175

Let us not forget the connections between Adam and Abraham:

Adam	Abraham
“Be fruitful and multiply” (1:28)	“I will make you a great nation” (12:2)
Place: Garden of Eden (Paradise, 2:8)	Place: Land of Canaan (like the Garden of the Lord, 13:10)
“God blessed them” (1:28)	“And I [God] will bless you” (12:2)
“God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man” (2:21)	“A deep sleep fell on Abram” (15:12)
Commits Sin involving wife (3:6)	Commits Sin involving wife (12:10-20)
Promise of Offspring (3:15)	Promise of Offspring (15:4)
Conflict between Offspring (4:1-16)	Conflict between Offspring (21:8-21)

I. Genesis 17:1-21 – The Continual Sign of the Covenant to Abraham

17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” 3 Then Abram fell on his face. 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. 7 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.** 8 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." 9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and **it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and 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.** 14 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." 15 And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 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." 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?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" 19 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.** 20 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. 21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year." 22 When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. 23 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. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. 27 And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

As we looked at Genesis 15, we observed that God ratified His covenant with Abram with a one-time, one-way oath-sign. God used a standard "formula" or "sign" for covenant making in the ancient world by halving an animal or animals and walking between them. God had Abram cut a series of animals in half, he put Abram to sleep (as he had done with Adam) and He walked between the halves of the animals. This was a vivid declaration with the strongest covenantal picture available in the ancient world that God would stake His own life on fulfilling this promise to Abram.

What we see in Genesis 17 is a restatement of the covenant to Abram which now involves a sign for him to perform. However, this will not be a one-time sign, but it will be a continual, regular sign through out the life of Abram, Sarai, and their offspring. Also, we see another covenant gesture from God by His changing Abram's name to Abraham (verse 5-6) and Sarai's name to Sarah (verse 16).

Naturally, this leads to some questions about circumcision. What is it? Why choose this as a sign? What does it mean? Who was responsible for such a sign? Are male infants responsible for their circumcision? If the covenant is everlasting, is this an everlasting sign?

II. Circumcision Test Case – Zipporah & Moses' Son (Exodus 4:21-26)

Exodus 4:21 *And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'" 24 At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' [3] feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" 26 So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.*

III. New Testament Understanding of Circumcision (Romans 2 & 4)

Romans 4:9 *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. 10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. 11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, 12 and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

Romans 2:25 *For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. 26 So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. 28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*