

The Lord Told Abraham to be Circumcised

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand and explain how Abram and Sarai tried to solve the problem of a lack of a son. Instead, they created future conflict for the descendants of Isaac. We also saw that true submission to one another is possible through Christ. In this topic, we will see that Abram had his name changed and was given the sign of circumcision.

Thirteen years had passed since the birth of Ishmael before we read that the Lord appeared to Abram again. Genesis 17:1-5 says, “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.’ Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: ‘As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.’” The first thing the Lord did when He appeared to Abram was tell him who He was. By this time, Abram was ninety-nine years old.

God began by saying, “I am Almighty God.” This is the first time that God calls Himself “Almighty God.” That name is used for God forty-seven additional times throughout the rest of the Old Testament. God told Abram to walk before him and be blameless. The word translated “blameless” is most commonly translated *without blemish* and was used of sacrifices. The word speaks of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:5, where we read, ““Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take *it* from the sheep or from the goats.”” Proverbs 11:5 says, “The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way aright, but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.” In this verse, we see that the blameless person is one who follows the Lord.

God reminded Abram that He would make His covenant with him and multiply him exceedingly. This was a reminder that God is the One who made the covenant, and only God signed that covenant. In the topic on Genesis 15, we saw that God walked between the sacrifices while Abram was asleep. Abram fell on his face as God talked with him. Here, we see the attitude of worship and respect that Abram had for God. Then, God went on to remind Abram of the three parts of the covenant. However, right in the middle of those three parts, God changed the name of Abram to show the importance of the first part of the promise since the name change was based on that part of the covenant. God told Abram that his new name was Abraham. Abram means “exalted father.” In contrast, Abraham means “father of a multitude or father of many nations.” God then explained to Abraham what his name would mean in the future. Genesis 17:6-8 says, “‘I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.’”

In addition to being the father of many nations, God promised Abraham that he would be exceedingly fruitful. Many nations and kings would come from his descendants. Here, we see that the covenant God gave to Abraham meant that he would have both personal blessing and that his descendants would have national blessing because they would become many different nations. However, this national blessing would actually affect all future nations. God had said, in Genesis 12:3, “‘I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the

families of the earth shall be blessed.” The blessing of Abraham would bring blessing to all of the families of the earth. This was due to the fact that Christ would come from the family of Abraham. Because of Christ, Revelation 7:9 says, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands...” This shows that the promise to Abraham included people of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. Every group of people on earth is blessed by this covenant.

The third part of the covenant also gave the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession to the descendants of Abraham. We will see in later passages that this part of the promise would be carried on through the family of Isaac. This is made very clear in Acts 7:5-6, where we read, “And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years.” Ishmael was thirteen years old at the time that God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision. However, the descendants of Ishmael were not in bondage to the Egyptians, so, God made it clear that this promise was to Isaac and his descendants.

God said that Abraham was now living in that land as a stranger. However, God said that land would belong to his descendants as an everlasting possession. Hebrews 11:8-10 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in a* foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” These verses tell us that the faith of Abraham caused him to look even beyond that physical land to the eternal city whose builder and maker is God.

Then, God went on to give Abraham a physical sign of that covenant. Genesis 17:9-14 says, “And God said to Abraham: ‘As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and 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 child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.’” Here, we see that God gave Abraham and his descendants a physical sign as a testimony of their obedience to the covenant.

God told Abraham that he and all of his male descendants were to be circumcised as a sign and reminder of the covenant. The word “circumcise” means *to cut off*. Here, God said that all male children were to have the flesh of their foreskins cut off. God said that this was to be done to each male child when that child was eight days old. Circumcision is not related to salvation because salvation is always by faith. Galatians 3:5-7 says, “Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, *does He do it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? — just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.” The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are physical sons of the covenant, but that does not result in faith in the promise of God. Only those who are spiritual sons of Abraham, by

faith, are also sons of God.

In addition to circumcising all of his male descendants, Abraham was told that he and his descendants were to circumcise any foreigner that was bought with money who was not a descendent of Abraham. In this case, these individuals would not be physical descendants of Abraham but would become identified with the descendants of Abraham, even though they had originally been purchased as slaves. Their descendants then became a part of the nations that descended from Abraham. In contrast, those who become a part of the family of God are not required to be circumcised. That was the false teaching that some Jews taught, in Acts 15:1, which says, “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” That led to the Jerusalem Council.

At that Council, Peter said, in Acts 15:8-11, “So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” The whole church stated their conclusion in Acts 15:28-29, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well...” Circumcision is never related to salvation.

In contrast, circumcision is related to being a part of the Jews and other descendants of Abraham. Here, Genesis 17:14 says, “And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that God made some promises to the Jews as a national people and other promises to the church and that we are not to confuse the two in our teaching. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.