

# Circumcision

Gen 17:1-14

SS Lesson for 09/10/2017

**Devotional Scripture:** Heb 6:13-20

## OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

*Key Verse: Gen 17:10*

*Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

*Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

THE CALL INTO THE COVENANT (GEN 17:1-3)

*Prerequisite of covenant is to walk blamelessly (1)*

Blameless so we can minister to God (Ps 101:6)

Blameless by walking according to God's word (Ps 119:1-3)

Blameless by being considered good and righteous (Prov 2:20)

Blameless by guarding ways (Prov 13:6)

Blameless through God's choosing (Eph 1:4)

Blameless by doing everything without complaining and arguing (Phil 2:14-16)

*Covenant parties are God and Abram (2)*

A covenant between parties that is remembered forever (Ps 105:8-10)

A covenant between parties that is sealed by the promise and grace of God (Gal 3:17-18)

A covenant between parties that was promised by God swearing by Himself (Heb 6:13)

*Response to covenant should be to accept with humility (3)*

Humility that comes through the fear of God (Prov 15:33)

Humility that brings wealth, honor and life (Prov 22:4)

Humility because of being God's chosen (Col 3:12)

THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT (GEN 17:4-6)

*Promise of blessing (4)*

God is faithful to His promises of blessings and does not violate His covenants (Ps 89:33-36)

God remembers His covenants and out of His great love blesses regardless of our rebellion (Ps 106:43-45)

God is faithful to His promises of blessings by continuing to redeem His people of the covenant (Ps 111:9)

God is faithful to His promises of blessings by upholding His people and making them a light to others (Isa 42:6)

God is faithful to His promises of blessings through Jesus' blood covenant (Matt 26:28)

*Name Change (5)*

God changed Jacob's name because of His perseverance (Gen 32:28)

God changed Solomon's name because He loved him (2 Sam 12:24-25)

God changed Peter's name because He had a rock-like purpose for him (John 1:40-42)

God will change the saved saints names because they overcame the world (Rev 2:17)

*God's redemptive plan (6)*

God's redemptive plan was manifested through Jesus being born in the flesh (Gal 4:3-6)

God's redemptive plan through Jesus giving of Himself for our redemption (Titus 2:11-14)

God's redemptive plan was foreknown and predestined (Rom 8:28-30)

God's redemptive plan is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:11-14)

God's redemptive plan was confirmed by His promise and oath (Heb 6:17-19)

THE PROMISE OF THE COVENANT (GEN 17:7-8)

*God's covenants and promises are eternal (7-8)*

God's plans and purposes stand forever (Ps 33:11)

God remembers His covenants forever (Ps 105:8)

God has created a new covenant that is eternal (Heb 9:15)

THE MARK OF THE COVENANT (GEN 17: 9-14)

*Mark of obedience (9-13)*

Obedience because it delights God (1 Sam 15:22)

Obedience leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)

Obedience leads to the praise of God by others (2 Cor 9:13)

Obedience keeps us remaining in God's love (John 15:10)  
Obedience leads to the reward of blessings (Deut 28:1-6)  
Obedience brings the reward of freedom (James 1:25)

#### *Mark of disobedience (14)*

Disobedience causes our actions to recoil on us (Ps 7:15-16)  
Disobedience caused by bad choices (Prov 1:29-31)  
Disobedience caused by stubbornness (Jer 9:13-14)  
Disobedience violates God's covenant (Deut 17:2-5)  
Disobedience dishonors God (Rom 2:23-24)

## CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

*God's Promise (17:1-8)*

*Stipulations of the Covenant (17:9-14)*

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY

## Introduction

### **Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson**

The lesson teaches us to understand the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant and its sign of **Circumcision**. The **study's aim** is to make the distinction between physical circumcision and circumcision of the heart. The **study's application** is to give greater attention to what we are like inwardly rather than outwardly.

*(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)*

### **Key Verse: Gen 17:10**

*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*

### **Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary**

This chapter records (a) God's assurance of His promises by changing the names of Abram (vv. 1-8) and Sarai (vv. 15-18), (b) God's instituting circumcision as the sign of the covenant (vv. 9-14), (c) God's sure word on the promises' fulfillment through Sarah (vv. 19-22), and (d) Abraham's compliance (vv. 23-27). God is dominant in the first three sections: He promised Abram a son and named him Isaac, He renamed Abram and Sarai to reflect that promise, and He instituted the sign.

**17:1-8.** God's promises to **Abram** grew more and more magnificent. As **God Almighty**, He was fully capable of accomplishing all His promises. (This is the first OT occurrence of the title "God Almighty" [*'el šadday*], which is used several times in Gen. [17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; cf. 49:25]. Some scholars suggest that *šadday* is related to the Akk. word *šadû* that means breast or mountain or both. [Some words describing parts of the body were also used for geographical descriptions; e.g., "mouth" of a river, "foot" of a mountain.] So *šadday*, when used of God, refers either to His ability to supply abundantly ["the Abundant One"] or to His majestic strength ["the Almighty One"].) Now, **God said... you will be the father of many nations** (17:4; cf. "a great nation," 12:2), and **kings will come from you** (17:6; cf. v. 16). And, God said, the **covenant** will be **everlasting** (v. 7). Also the **land of Canaan**, which Abram would possess (15:7), would be **an everlasting possession** of Abram's descendants. The patriarch's name change was crucial. The name **Abram** (17:5), meaning "exalted father," harked *back* to Terah (11:27) and implied that Abram came from royal lineage. But in Hebrew the name **Abraham** (*'abrâhâm*) sounds similar to "**father of a multitude**" (*'ab hâmôn*) of **nations** (17:4-5). His new name implied a look *ahead* to his **descendants**. One can well imagine that Abram was hurt by the suppressed smiles on the faces of his men when he told them to call him Abraham, meaning the father of a multitude of nations—**when he was 99 years old** (vv. 1, 24). Yet Abraham knew that God had not deceived him. His new name and his wife's new name were perpetual reminders of God's sure word. Every time someone addressed him he would recall God's promise, until finally Isaac, the child of promise, would call him "abba" (father).

**17:9-14.** The other confirming sign (cf. "confirm" in v. 2) was circumcision. This one applied to all males who shared the promise. Circumcision was practiced elsewhere in the ancient Near East, but here it achieved a new meaning. It too would remind **Abraham** and his **descendants** of the **everlasting covenant**

(v. 13; cf. vv. 7, 19). By this symbol God impressed them with the impurity of nature and with dependence on God for the production of all life. They would recognize and remember: (a) that native impurity must be laid aside, especially in marriage, and (b) that human nature is unable to generate the promised seed. They must be loyal to the family. Any Israelite who refused to be cut physically in this way would be **cut off** (separated) **from his people** (v. 14) because of his disobedience to God's command. Elsewhere Scripture refers to circumcision as a symbol of separation, purity, and loyalty to the covenant. Moses said that God would circumcise the hearts of His people so that they might be devoted to Him (Deut. 30:6). And Paul wrote that "circumcision of the heart" (i.e., being inwardly set apart "by the Spirit") evidences salvation and fellowship with God (Rom. 2:28-29; cf. Rom. 4:11). One must turn in confidence to God and His promises, laying aside natural strength. Unbelief is described as having an uncircumcised heart (Jer. 9:26; Ezek. 44:7-9).

**17:15-18.** God announced that **Sarai** was to be called **Sarah**. This new name, though involving only a slight change and meaning "princess," was fitting for one whose seed would produce **kings** (v. 16; cf. v. 6). Hearing this, **Abraham ... laughed** because it seemed incredible that a barren **90-year-old** woman could give birth to a **son**. Abraham had assumed that his descendants would come through **Ishmael**.

**17:19-22.** Yet **God** assured him that she would **bear... a son** whose name would be **Isaac**, meaning "he laughs" (v. 19). His name would be a constant reminder that a word from God was laughed at. **Ishmael** was not forgotten, however, for God said he would have many descendants also. Even the number of Ishmael's sons—**12**—was predicted. Their names are recorded in 25:13-15.

**17:23-27.** However, **Abraham**, having received God's word about Isaac, immediately obeyed God's command about circumcision, thus reflecting his faith in God's word. Abraham was **circumcised** at the age of **99... Ishmael at 13**, and **every male in the patriarch's household**, whether **born there or bought from a foreigner**, was also **circumcised**.

### **Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

I remember as a young pastor struggling with how to talk about circumcision from the pulpit as I expounded a text that mentioned it. After all, the act of circumcision concerns a part of the male body usually not discussed in such settings! That concern led to the following thought: Why did God design such a ritual, carried out by cutting right into the flesh? Why such an extreme measure? The Bible says that God's covenant with Abraham's seed would be in [their] flesh (Gen. 17:13). This shows us how serious God was about His covenants. That is what we must learn as we study this sign. God was and is very serious about the relationship He has with His people through His covenantal promises. And we should be serious about responding to His grace. Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with Israel. Covenants must be made and received with seriousness. The Lord gave clear instructions concerning the circumcision of Abraham and all his people and posterity. He even gave the new names Abraham and Sarah in conjunction with it, teaching the couple that their lives had changed forever by entering into a covenant with Him (Gen. 17:5,15). So we see the seriousness of entering into a covenant with God. It changes everything. God's offer of salvation and an eternal relationship is to be taken seriously. Eternal salvation is no trifle. A relationship with God is not a small thing. For Abraham and his posterity, it was marked by cutting into their flesh. There is no way anyone could forget that. Let us always take God seriously—His grace, His offer of salvation, His commands, and His promises. Of course, the nature of circumcision in Old Testament times related to God's dealings with His people, Israel. The sign itself was pointing to something greater, including a chosen people, a special land, and a coming Messiah. We must see the total vision of what God promises in His covenant. The act of circumcision becomes somewhat pointless if it is divorced from all the teaching and meaning that went with it. For Israel, circumcision meant that they were God's people and the inheritors of His great saving purposes and messianic promises. His covenant had a large vision, which was conveyed as the ritual of circumcision was passed down and practiced. Marking human beings in the flesh ensured that this vision would be taught and remembered. As we look back on it now, we see this covenant vision even more clearly. There is a spiritual circumcision. The ultimate point had always been not a physical circumcision but a spiritual and inward circumcision (Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:25-29). The spiritual circumcision of the Christian comes by faith in Christ (Rom. 3:31); it is accomplished without hands, resulting in the forgiveness of sins (Col. 2:11-13). The crucial thing to possess is spiritual circumcision. The fleshly ritual has no bearing on salvation. It was only a sign pointing to a greater, spiritual reality (Phil. 3:3). The inward circumcision through Christ is the ultimate reality. It too must be treated with seriousness.

## **Lesson Introduction and Background**

### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

German immigrant Martin Hildebrandt is said to have been the first professional tattoo artist in the United States. He traveled from camp to camp during the American Civil War, tattooing both Union and Confederate soldiers. The tradition of getting a tattoo to signify service in the American military continues to this day. The permanent nature of a tattoo as well as the pain associated with getting one makes it a rite of passage in some sense for many today. Ancient Israelites were forbidden to “put tattoo marks” on their skin (Leviticus 19:28), but tattoos are mainstream in modern Western culture. One in three Americans between the ages of 18 and 50 has at least one tattoo. Regardless of what one may think of this practice, such a permanent and visible mark is recognized as one of association. God gave Abraham and his descendants a permanent mark to show that they belonged to him. But the mark of circumcision was more personal and less visible.

Abraham, as we see him renamed in Genesis 17:5, first appears in the biblical record as Abram in 11:26. There his birth to Terah is noted, and the remainder of Genesis 11 records the family’s move from Ur of the Chaldeans (in modern Iraq) to Harran (in modern Syria). God called Abram to leave his family (or most of it) and to go to a land that God would show him (Genesis 12:1). Scholars are divided on whether the call in chapter 12 is a repeat of an earlier call, in Ur, or is actually a record of the earlier call. In Stephen’s defense to the Sanhedrin, he affirmed that God called Abram “while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran” (Acts 7:2). God promised to make of Abram a great nation, to bless him, and to make his name great (Genesis 12:2). He was age 75 when he left Harran for the land of Canaan (12:4). God repeated his promise in Genesis 13. Abram had separated from nephew Lot because the land could not support the livestock of both groups (13:5-12). Lot had taken the lush Jordan valley toward Sodom, so Abram was left with land that had lesser pasture. It seemed he got the worse part of the deal, but God reassured him of his future (13:16, 17). The promises are stated a third time in Genesis 15. “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (15:6). The promises depended on Abram’s having an heir, but we see him childless through Genesis 15. Sarai, Abram’s wife, proposed a solution: “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her” (16:2). Abram agreed, and so he became the father of Ishmael by Sarai’s servant, Hagar. But Ishmael, born to Abram at age 86 (16:16), was not the child of promise.

## **Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **The Call into the Covenant (Gen 17:1-3)**

- 1 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.
- 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."
- 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying:

#### **Prerequisite of covenant is to walk blamelessly (1)**

*Blameless so we can minister to God (Ps 101:6)*

6 My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me.

*Blameless by walking according to God's word (Ps 119:1-3)*

Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. 2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. 3 They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

*Blameless by being considered good and righteous (Prov 2:20)*

20 Thus you will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous.

*Blameless by guarding ways (Prov 13:6)*

6 Righteousness guards the one whose way is blameless, But wickedness subverts the sinner.

*Blameless through God's choosing (Eph 1:4)*

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

*Blameless by doing everything without complaining and arguing (Phil 2:14-16)*

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

### **Covenant parties are God and Abram (2)**

*A covenant between parties that is remembered forever (Ps 105:8-10)*

8 He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, 9 the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. 10 He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant:

*A covenant between parties that is sealed by the promise and grace of God (Gal 3:17-18)*

17 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. 18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

*A covenant between parties that was promised by God swearing by Himself (Heb 6:13)*

13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,

### **Response to covenant should be to accept with humility (3)**

*Humility that comes through the fear of God (Prov 15:33)*

33 The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

*Humility that brings wealth, honor and life (Prov 22:4)*

4 Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.

*Humility because of being God's chosen (Col 3:12)*

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

### **The Sign of the Covenant (Gen 17:4-6)**

4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.

5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.

6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

### **Promise of blessing (4)**

*God is faithful to His promises of blessings and does not violate His covenants (Ps 89:33-36)*

33 but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. 34 I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. 35 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness — and I will not lie to David — 36 that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun;

*God remembers His covenants and out of His great love blesses regardless of our rebellion (Ps 106:43-45)*

43 Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. 44 But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; 45 for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.

*God is faithful to His promises of blessings by continuing to redeem His people of the covenant (Ps 111:9)*

9 He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever — holy and awesome is his name.

*God is faithful to His promises of blessings by upholding His people and making them a light to others (Isa 42:6)*

6 "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

*God is faithful to His promises of blessings through Jesus' blood covenant (Matt 26:28)*

28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

## **Name Change (5)**

*God changed Jacob's name because of His perseverance (Gen 32:28)*

28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

*God changed Solomon's name because He loved him (2 Sam 12:24-25)*

24 Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; 25 and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

*God changed Peter's name because He had a rock-like purpose for him (John 1:40-42)*

40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

*God will change the saved saints names because they overcame the world (Rev 2:17)*

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

## **God's redemptive plan (6)**

*God's redemptive plan was manifested through Jesus being born in the flesh (Gal 4:3-6)*

3 So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. 4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

*God's redemptive plan through Jesus giving of Himself for our redemption (Titus 2:11-14)*

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

*God's redemptive plan was foreknown and predestined (Rom 8:28-30)*

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

*God's redemptive plan is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:11-14)*

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

*God's redemptive plan was confirmed by His promise and oath (Heb 6:17-19)*

17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

### ***The Promise of the Covenant (Gen 17:7-8)***

7 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.

8 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."

### **God's covenants and promises are eternal (7-8)**

*God's plans and purposes stand forever (Ps 33:11)*

11 But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

*God remembers His covenants forever (Ps 105:8)*

8 He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,

*God has created a new covenant that is eternal (Heb 9:15)*

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

### ***The Mark of the Covenant (Gen 17: 9-14)***

9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

10 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;

11 and 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 child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.

13 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.

14 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."

### **Mark of obedience (9-13)**

*Obedience because it delights God (1 Sam 15:22)*

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

*Obedience leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)*

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

*Obedience leads to the praise of God by others (2 Cor 9:13)*

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

*Obedience keeps us remaining in God's love (John 15:10)*

10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

*Obedience leads to the reward of blessings (Deut 28:1-6)*

1 If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

*Obedience brings the reward of freedom (James 1:25)*

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

**Mark of disobedience (14)**

*Disobedience causes our actions to recoil on us (Ps 7:15-16)*

15 He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. 16 The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.

*Disobedience caused by bad choices (Prov 1:29-31)*

29 Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord, 30 since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, 31 they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

*Disobedience caused by stubbornness (Jer 9:13-14)*

13 The Lord said, "It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law. 14 Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them."

*Disobedience violates God's covenant (Deut 17:2-5)*

2 If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the Lord gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God in violation of his covenant, 3 and contrary to my command has worshiped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars of the sky, 4 and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.

*Disobedience dishonors God (Rom 2:23-24)*

23 You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? 24 As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."



## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

#### God's Promise (17:1-8)

God's words in chapter 17 break the silence of 13 years. After thirteen years of silence, Abram must have been greatly encouraged by this encounter with God. In times past, God had only been said to have spoken to Abram (cf. 12:1) or come in a vision (15:12-17). Here, after 24 years, God revealed Himself; He appeared to Abram. Abram had seen God for the first time.

God had disclosed Himself to Abram in a more intimate fashion. Also, He manifested Himself more fully in terms of His character and attributes. God referred to Himself as 'God Almighty,' *El Shaddai*. This is the first time God has been called by this name. It is a designation which emphasizes His infinite power. What God had long before determined, and what would now be more precisely defined, would depend upon a God of infinite power to accomplish.

Previously, God had required little of Abram other than to leave (Ur) and believe (15:6) in His promise. Now that the covenant was about to be implemented, Abram would be required to behave in a way that God prescribed. He must walk before his God blamelessly, not in perfection, but in purity (15:1). It is probably not without significance that God withheld specific duties until long after Abram's belief was evident, so that works are not the basis of the covenant but a by-product of it.

Just as Abram had heard God refer to Himself by a new name, so Abram is renamed, a token of his destiny. The name Abram meant 'high father' or 'exalted father.' This alone may have proved to be an embarrassment to Abram who had only one child and that by a slave. But now his name was changed to 'father of a multitude.' How could Abraham ever live this name down? By the grace of God, he would soon live up to his new name.

Most of us have had the unhappy experience of making an agreement only to find that it profited us far less than we had hoped for and been led to expect. Just the opposite is true with God's promises. The more we learn of them, the richer the blessings they contain. Abram had been told that he would become a great nation (12:2); now he is told that in fact he will become the 'father of a multitude of nations' (17:4). Beyond this, he will be the father of kings (17:6). *El Shaddai* promised to be a God to Abram and to his descendants (17:7), among whom we must include Abram's spiritual seed (cf. Galatians 3:16). The covenant was not only between Abraham and God, but between God and Abraham's seed, forever.

#### Stipulations of the Covenant (17:9-14)

There is a clearly defined outline of the obligations of this covenant described in chapter 17. In verse 4 God said, 'As for Me.' In verse 9 He said, 'As for you.' In verse 15 we read, 'As for Sarai.' Finally, in verse 20, we find, 'As for Ishmael,' God's covenant is eternal and sure. The enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant is conditional. Only by keeping these conditions can man enjoy the blessings of God as guaranteed in the covenant.

The obligation upon Abraham and his descendants was that they be circumcised (Genesis 17:10).

In one way, circumcision seems too simple. How can God require only this one act? Let us remember that God had already said to Abraham, "Walk before Me, and be blameless" (verse 1). Circumcision was not all that Abraham was required to do—rather, it was the symbol of his relationship to God and signified what his moral conduct should be. Circumcision, for Abraham, meant that he had bound himself to God in this covenant. He looked forward to its blessings, and he also submitted to its stipulations.

Circumcision is the only act of surgery of its kind that is beneficial to mankind. More than its physical benefits, it signifies spiritual requirements as well. Symbolically, the flesh is put away. Abram had acquired a son by the use of his reproductive organ. Now he submitted it to God. No Israelite could ever engage in the sex act without being reminded of the fact that he belonged to God. Children that were begotten were to be brought up according to God's Word. Circumcision of infant sons did not save them but evidenced the faith of the father and mother in the God of Abraham. As that young child grew up, his circumcision was a sign to him that he was different from other boys—he belonged to God. It was not the circumcision that saved the boy, but the sign which would forever remind him of what God required to enjoy the benefits of His covenant. Circumcision of the male only may have signified the special responsibility which God had assigned to the father. (This may have had particular significance to Abraham after the incident with Hagar.) Some have emphasized the similarities between baptism and circumcision and surely there are some (cf. Colossians 2:10-12). Both signify

a union with God that has already occurred. Both necessitate the putting away of former things and living a life pleasing to God (cf. Romans 6:1ff; Colossians 3:1-11).

But there are rather obvious differences which must be kept in mind. Baptism is for believing adults, as an indication of their faith in God (Acts 16:33; 19:1-7). Circumcision was performed on infants eight days old and evidenced the faith of the parents. Baptism was a public sign, circumcision was a private sign. Baptism is for all believers, male and female, circumcision was only for the males. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant with Abraham; baptism is not the sign of the New Covenant but the Lord's supper (cf. Luke 22:20).

*(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/18-grasping-great-truth-god-genesis-171-27>)*

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

In any negotiation, certain factors are known as deal breakers. These are matters that must be satisfied or there is no transaction. In buying a house or car, not having a clear title is a deal breaker. If the seller cannot produce a title without encumbrances (liens, etc.) on the item for sale, then the wise buyer will walk away. The buyer will not accept promises such as, "I'll send you the title later, once I clear up the tax lien on the property." Failure to have a clear title in hand is a deal breaker. Other situations don't have the same legal concern as a clear title, but they are deal breakers nonetheless. In warm, humid climates, lack of air-conditioning is a deal breaker to many home buyers. For parents, a home in an inferior school district is a deal breaker. These kinds of deal breakers vary from buyer to buyer, but we all have them. But it was indeed critically important—and that fact was stated. No Israelite had an excuse for failure in this matter. Perhaps the reason it was so important was because it had significance beyond itself, beyond even the covenant to which it witnessed. The New Testament calls features of the old covenant "a shadow" of something more substantial to come (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6; compare 6:15).

### ***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary***

1. Age presents no challenge to God's power (Gen. 17:1)
2. Trust God every step of the way through an obedient life of worship (vss. 1-2)
3. God guides us to realize His promises and our potential as we worship wholeheartedly (vss. 3-6)
4. God's faithfulness to His Word does not depend on man's response (vss. 7-8)
5. Obedience reveals that we trust what God has said (vss. 9-10)
6. As we grow closer to God, we continue to discard elements from our old life of sin (vss. 11-12)
7. Disobedience bears consequences beyond our own lives (vss. 13-14)