

REVIEW

Noah, a nobody, was called by God.
Abram, a nobody, was also called.

<u>God saved → made a covenant → gave a covenant sign</u>		
Gen 6-8	Gen 9:8-11	Gen 9:12-17
Gen 11-12	Gen 15	Gen 17

God swore the covenant, Abram was the passive party.
Jesus is the surety of Abram's covenant blessings!
God gives the covenant sign to help our forgetfulness.
In the case of Noah, it was the rainbow.
In the case of Abram, the sign was **circumcision**.
We'll see the institution of the sign in Gen 17:1-14.

Outline:

- ▶ *The Covenant affirmation (1-3)*
- ▶ *The Chief protagonist (4-8)*
- ▶ *The Covenant sign (9-14)*

▶ The Covenant Affirmation (1-3)

Gen 17:1-2 *When Abram was 99 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."*

- ☞ God's response to Abram's struggling heart (Hagar/Ishmael)
- ☞ God continuously assures Abram of his promise:
Words: Gen 12, 13, 15, 15, and 17.
Actions: separating/rescuing Lot, cutting the covenant, blessing Ishmael.

We should **NOT** shy away from calling Christians to **obey and follow** God!

We call people to obey precisely because we **know God** who calls us is **holy** and **all-sufficient** to keep his covenant with us.

- ☞ His promise is sure because of who **God** is:
Yahweh, the El Shaddai: the almighty, all-sufficient I AM.
Calvin: "Let us have no other foundation of our faith than this word 'I', ... [spoken] by the mouth of God alone."

- ☞ **Make:** the original Hebrew word is "give." The Covenant had been cut/made official in Gen. 15.
2 Pet 1:10 *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble (ESV: to confirm your calling and election).*

Gen 17:3 *Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying...*

What is your response when you hear the word of God?

The **first-generation Israelites** didn't believe. They accused/slandered God. But **Abram—the father of all believers**—believed; bowed to worship God. This leads to even more intimate relationship between Abram and God.
The more you believe God and put your trust in Him, the more you love him.

▶ The Chief Protagonist (4-8)

Gen 17:4-5 *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.*

This promise is unshakable, unassailable because it is grounded in God himself: his unchangeable character and his oath. Our weak faith and inconsistent obedience cause us to doubt!

From God's end, his covenant IS with Abram. It IS a **present reality**.

Name: identity; given by the owner/parents. Adam had the authority to name the animals.

In creation, God speaks, "Let there be light!" → and it became so; light is created.
"I call you Abraham, a father of many nations" → Abraham became so; it became his name.

God gives his child a new name (Rev. 2:17), God writes on his child his name (Rev. 3:12)

Meaning: **You are no longer your old self. You are a new creation. You belong to me!**

Gen 17:6-8 "I will establish my covenant between me and you" 3rd time, + "your descendants."

To remind our forgetful hearts, the Bible is repetitive, but in a beautiful way. See the structure:

a 1 Abram was 99 years old.

b 1 The Lord appeared to Abram.

c 2 I will multiply you exceedingly.

d 3 Abram fell on his face.

e 4-6 You shall be a father of many nations.

f 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants.

x 7-8 To be God to you and your descendants after you.

f' 9-14 You shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants.

e' 15-16 She shall be a mother of nations.

d' 17 Abram fell on his face.

c' 18-21 I will multiply him exceedingly.

b' 22 God went up from Abraham.

a' 23-27 Abraham was 99 years old.

The heart of the covenant is the **Immanuel** principle—
God with us.
"I will be God to you and your descendants!"

God is the main actor in fulfilling his commandments. Man's **responsibility** meets God's **grace**.

Ligon Duncan: "Among other things, grace is for the enabling of the believer to do what God has called the believer to do." We obey because the Spirit works in us!

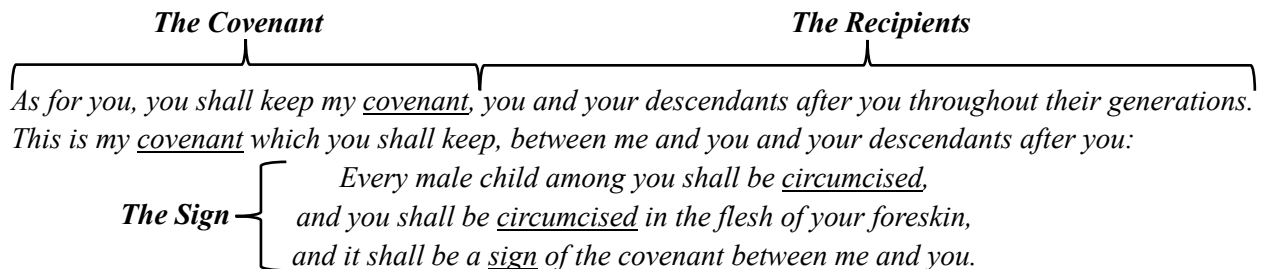
By the **grace of God in Christ**, all the saints are enabled to say, "O, How I love your law!" Ps 119:97

Christians are NOT antinomians. The law of God is fulfilled in us who walk in the Spirit!

Do you see in your heart the longing to obey God's law, to want to love him more?

► The Sign Instituted (9-14)

The Relationship between the sign and the covenant it signifies is so close that the names are interchangeable. See the flow and parallelism of the text in **Gen 17:9-11**:



The Old Covenant is mission oriented; to bless other nations and bring them to Yahweh.

The New Covenant is so much more missiological; to bless others and bring them to Jesus.

Acts 2:38-39 Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.

Baptism is the covenant sign for Christians, a sign of the entrance to the covenant community. As God is serious with circumcision, **God is serious with church membership. We must obey!** Remember that God threatened to kill Moses's son for not being circumcised (Ex 4:24-26).

The Recipients: Abraham and every male under his authority. Ishmael is clearly not the son of the covenant, but since he was in Abraham's house, he was to be circumcised.

Likewise, baptism is to be administered to Christians and their children.

The Role. As agreements are written on papers, carved on stones, God's covenant with Abraham is written in the flesh, literally. It does not bring salvation! Circumcision's role as the sign is:

To serve as an outward sign of the entrance into the covenant community.

Gen 17:14 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.

To signify the need for the circumcision of the heart and the eternal life it brings.

Deut 10:16 Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

Deut 30:6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

To remind the person's responsibility as God's people, rather than leading to presumption.

Rom 2:25 For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.

Likewise, baptism reminds the one baptized and the covenant community of all the above.

SUMMARY

1. Circumcision—baptism—does not save! Like Abraham, we are counted righteous by grace.
2. God's saving grace brings about obedience. **We are to yield, or God will discipline us.** Just as every child of Abraham must be circumcised/ be a member of the covenant community, every Christian must strive to be a professing member of the visible church.
3. God gives the covenant sign not for him but for our benefits that we may be affirmed and reminded of **his faithfulness** and **our obligation** as his children.

On one side, God makes it **our obligation** to circumcise our heart, to repent and love him.

On the other side, **God is the active agent** who circumcises our heart (see Deut 10:16 & 30:6 above).

If you are in Christ, trust his Word and find assurance and comfort!
His faithfulness and assurance will cause you to be more eager to trust and obey!

If you have not circumcised your heart and love God with all our heart and soul, you won't live.
But you can trust in Jesus who is able and willing to circumcise your heart so that you may live.
Will you trust him to do this live-giving surgery?