

Scripture: Genesis 17:1-14
5/28/2017

Should Infants of Believers also Be Baptized?

Beloved in Christ, to answer this question we should go back to the Old Testament. Every teaching in the New Testament has its roots in the Old Testament.

If you are wondering what the Bible teaches about the baptism (洗礼) of believers and their children [infants], we must begin in the Old Testament. My goal is to show from Scripture that God commands that infants, children of believers ought to be baptized. May the Holy Spirit persuade us this truth. In Genesis 17:1-14, the Almighty God proclaims to Abraham that believers and their children belong to Him. He does so

By confirming His promises [vv.1-8]

By giving the sign of His promises [vv.9-14]

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Abram was 75 years old when God saved him from sin and from worshipping other gods. God told him to leave his country and his family [Genesis 12:1-3]. How was he saved? He was saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ to come. Genesis 15:6 says that, “*Abram believed in the LORD and He accounted it to him for righteousness (义) .*”

Just as we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, Abram too was saved by grace through faith. When God saved Abram, He established a covenant (约) relationship with him, promising him descendants, land and that all nations would be blessed through him.

Now 24 years later, when Abram was 99 years old, still he had no children through Sarah his wife. Still he had no land. **Verses 1-3**, “*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... ”*

He says, “I am Almighty God” saying ‘I will keep His promises.’ He will make His promises reality! ‘Trust Me, Abram. Walk before Me. I make My covenant between Me and you. I will multiply you.’ Abram worships God.

About this, Paul comments in Romans 4, “*and not being weak in faith, he [Abraham] did not consider his own body, already dead [since he was about a hundred years old], and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver (动摇) at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God” [4:19-20].*

God is Almighty God. He is God of the resurrection (复活) . He brings the dead to life. He confirms His promises, reassures Abram in verses 4-8.

Notice, in **verse 4**, Almighty God says to Abram, “*As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you... ”* He binds Himself to Abram in promise. Literally, He is saying, ‘From my side, I give you My promise.’ I will perform all that I have said. I am Almighty God.

God confirms His promise to Abram in **verse 5** by changing his name from Abram to Abraham, which means “father of many nations.”

Abraham’s descendants will include many nations. Hold on to that thought! God makes a covenant with Abraham for the sake of the nations, for your sakes. Think back to Genesis 12:3. God says, “*in you all the*

families of the earth shall be blessed.” In Abraham, ultimately in Christ 2000 years later, God would open up the covenant of salvation to all nations, not just to Abraham’s physical descendants! That’s why God changed his name to Abraham! Abraham’s seed, ultimately Jesus, is the chosen pathway to God’s blessing for the world!

But it all begins with God’s covenant promise to Abraham in **verse 7**. *“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”*

God tells Abraham that the covenant was not only for him, but for his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so on. Be sure you understand this. These children had not been born. They had not expressed faith; yet God was promising to deal in a special way with them because of His love in Christ. God is not only dealing with Abraham as an individual. He entered into a covenant with Abraham’s family!

Four hundred years later, Abraham’s family had grown into a great nation of over one million people. While slaves in Egypt, they prayed to God. What do we hear in Exodus 2:24-25, *“So God heard their groaning (叹息, 呻吟) ; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham . . . “* Why did God regard them? Was it because they were a minority (少数) ? Or because they were better than someone else? Or because they were mistreated (被虐待) ? God had regard for them because of His promise!

Because of His love in Christ, He made this promise to Abraham. Kings came forth from Abraham as He promised in **verse 6**. David, Solomon and ultimately Christ, the King, would come. He would die for our sin and rise again, conquering sin, death and hell on our behalf. He perfectly kept God’s covenant and inherited (继承) all its blessing for all who trust in Him! Today, in Christ, this is reality! All who believe in Christ, the Bible says, are now spiritual children of Abraham {Galatians 3:7}– Chinese, Dutch, Indians, Pakistanis. They and their children belong to the God of Abraham.

Remember on Pentecost Day (五旬节) , ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, the Spirit of God was poured out on the church. People from every nation were present Peter said the same thing God said to Abraham. To all who believed in Christ, there was the promise of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Then he says, *“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”* [Acts 2:37-39].

As with Abraham, so here God’s promise was to believers and to their children. Not only believers, but also their children belong to the Lord Jesus.

Notice, according to verse 7, the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants is called an *“everlasting covenant.”* (永恒之约) It didn’t end with the coming of Jesus. This covenant continues in Jesus today. God has given the spiritual descendants of Abraham, not just the land of Canaan [**verse 8**] but the whole world. God has given Christ, the King, the Seed of Abraham, all authority over heaven and earth [Matthew 28:18].

God is indeed the Almighty!

God said to Abraham, *“As for Me, My covenant is with you.* It is fulfilled in Christ who is the Seed. Galatians 3:16 says: *“And to Abraham and his Seed [Christ] were the promises made.”* God in Christ gives Himself, His life, to believers and their children.

But there is the other side of the covenant in verse 9. God says to Abraham, *“As for you....”* This brings us to our second point. His covenant includes infants. He shows this

By giving the sign of His promises [vv.9-14].

Before talking about the sign God gives that shows believers and their children belong to Him, let's look at **verse 9**: "*As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout the generations.*" God establishes His covenant relationship, but this relationship comes with responsibilities.

The word for "keep" can also mean guard or give heed. Guard the relationship God established with you: you, your children, and the generations following. Walk in His ways. Walk in the way of His promises, in the way of Christ, in the way of His Word. Guard it because our sinful human nature is to walk away from Him, and thus the way of life! Train your children. Teach them.

In the next chapter Genesis 18:19, God says about Abraham, "... *I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice (公义), that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.*"

And in **verses 10-11**, God commands Abraham to guard the covenant by circumcising (给...行割礼) his children. He belongs to God; and so do they! "*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 (包皮), and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.'*" The covenant included circumcision (割礼) .

God gave Abraham a permanent sign and stamp to mark that covenant relationship. It's not that hard to understand. When a young man and woman get married, they make a covenant and give each other a ring as a sign of their covenant. When I look at the ring on my wife's left hand, I am reminded of my covenant to her. I belong to her; she belongs to me. Likewise, a cut in the foreskin was a reminder of God's covenant to the child.

Circumcision was a sign and seal (封印) of God's covenant. Why did God choose circumcision as a sign? Circumcision represented cleanliness (洁净) . Isaiah 52:1 equates the uncircumcised with the unclean. The cutting away of the foreskin in circumcision represented a cutting away from sin and a setting apart to God. Any adult, outside of Israel, who became a believer, was to be circumcised. They practiced "believer's circumcision."

Yet here we find a special command. God tells Abraham to apply this sign of the covenant also to male infants, 8 days old, born in his house. You ask, "How could this sign of salvation be applied to an infant who had not yet believed?" He's only eight days old!

But applying this sign does not mean they believed and were saved. Circumcision didn't save Abraham either! He was saved by God's grace through faith. By applying this sign God shows that He set them apart for Him. They belonged to Him because their believing parents belonged to Him. God applied this sign to infants, not because they had faith, but because of His covenant.

Take for example, a rancher (农场主) . Say his name is Sam. He has many cattle. Other ranchers have their cattle and they share the same field as Sam. How will David know which ones are his cattle? He brands the mark "S" [for Sam] on them. And if his cattle get calves, what will he do? He will also brand them with an "S". They belong to him. Otherwise another rancher might claim them!

In **verses 12-13**, God commands believing Abraham to apply this mark for his whole household, including male infants [women and girls were counted as bearing the sign of the covenant through the males]. Note God says, "*and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" [v.13].* Notice He says an "everlasting" covenant. And a male child who was not circumcised would be cut off from God's people. That's how seriously God took it. God almost killed Moses for not applying God's sign, circumcision, to

his own sons [Exodus 4:24]

Does circumcision still apply today? No. Circumcision has been replaced by baptism. Baptism is also called circumcision in Colossians 2:11-12. It is referred as to the circumcision of Christ, Christian circumcision, meaning baptism. It is the new sign God gives to believers and their children.

To those who were cut in heart at Pentecost, Peter said, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children....”*

Note, though it is a New Testament sign, God’s covenant remains the same. It is an everlasting covenant. It applies to believers and their offspring. Like Abraham and his household in the Old Testament, we read of the Philippians jailer (狱卒) who believed and his household baptized [Acts 16:34]. Lydia and her household were baptized [Acts 16:15]. 1 Corinthians 1:16 speaks about Paul baptizing the household of Stephanus.

Believers in Jesus are baptized, but so must their babies be baptized. They are included in the covenant. They belong to Him. This shows in baptism. Baptism, as God’s sign, also sets the child apart: holy to the Lord. This is similar to utensils (器具) or people anointed (被膏抹) with water or oil in the Old Testament and set apart for holy use. [Read 1 Corinthians 7:14]. What a comfort to know that God puts His name -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit on infants, who need Jesus no less than adults!

Christians are to guard the covenant relationship by baptizing their children [infants]. They, no less than adults, need the forgiveness of sins through Christ’s blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Baptism is a sign of that. Water is applied to the child’s head, sprinkled or poured. Today, this sign is applied to males and females.

Why does God choose water? Water cleanses. It is a sign of spiritual cleansing, the cleansing of our sins through the shed blood of Christ. Like circumcision, baptism does not save. Christ saves through faith. But it’s a stamp (印章), a mark on the child showing they belong to God. As the child grows, God calls him to believe and embrace His covenant promises.

Parents have the responsibility to raise and instruct their children for God. They ought to remind their children of God’s promise:

‘ Christ gave Himself for you, now give yourself to Christ in faith.’

But they also remind the child of God’s warning:

‘If you don’t receive God’s promises in faith, without repenting (悔改) of sin and believing in Christ, this sign will testify against you and you will be cut off (剪除) from the covenant.’

Think of the Lord’s opening words to Abraham in Genesis 17, *‘I am God Almighty.’* God can cause the new life to enter us, and our children, for He is Almighty. In baptism, God shows and seals this. This is God’s covenant relationship with believers. It hasn’t changed. *“As for Me . . .” [v.4].* God gives Himself to us in Christ. But there is the other side, our side. *“As for you...” [v.9].* We give ourselves and our children back to God. We belong to Him. Baptism shows and seals God’s promises of salvation to all who believe. Should children of believers be baptized? God says so! Amen.