

“The Sign Of The Covenant”

Acts 7:8/Genesis 17:1-27

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Teaching Aim: To examine the importance of circumcision to the Jewish people and see how it is related to the Abrahamic Covenant. To realize the positive and negative messages that are conveyed through this rite of circumcision. To understand the connection between the circumcision of 8-day old Jewish male infants and the baptism of infants by many Christians today. To recognize the ultimate circumcision is the circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit at conversion.

DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (*BIBLE STUDY*)

Part I: The everlasting promise of the Abrahamic Covenant (Acts 7:8/Gen. 17:1-8)

1. Why do you think Stephen spoke about Abraham and referred back to circumcision? (See **Acts 7:8; Gen. 17**) What major event in the life of Abram took place thirteen years prior this encounter with God? (See **Gen. 16:1-15**) Why did Sarai take her maidservant Hagar and present her to her husband Abram? What usually happens when we operate in the flesh and try to help God? What world conflict do we see happening today as a result of this act?

2. As we come to **Gen. chapter 17**, Abram had a vision of God for the fourth time. How old was Abram when the Lord appeared to him in **verse 1**? How old was he when God first promised him a child? (See **Gen 12:1-9**) Abram had been waiting 24 years for the fulfillment of this promise when we come to **Genesis chapter 17**. What did God command Abram to do in **verse 1**? What did He promise to do for him in **verse 2**? Is it possible that God did this because Abram had not been obedient to wait for him in the past?

3. How did Abram respond to the appearance of God (**vs. 3**)? What promise did God reaffirm in **verse 4**? (See **Gen. 12:1-3**) What is the definition of the word “covenant?” (See Dictionary) What kind of covenants do we make today? Are there consequences for not keeping them? Share some examples.

4. There is a lot to a name in the Bible. What was the significance of God changing Abram’s name in **verse 5**? How did it relate to His promise? What does the name “Abram” mean? What is the meaning of the name “Abraham?” (See Commentaries) Who are some other heroes of the faith who had their names changed? What were their new names? (See **Gen. 32:24-32; John 1:40-42**)

5. How did God fulfill the promises that He gave to Abraham in **verse 6**? Does God's promise include both Jews and Gentiles? How does this promise ultimately point toward the Messiah? Twelve times in **Gen. chapter 17**, God says, "*I will.*" What is the significance of God taking on the responsibility to fulfill His covenants (**vs. 7**)? Why should this be an encouragement to each of us? How long does God's covenant stand for? What can we learn about the faith of Abraham from **Rom. 4:19-22**?

6. Most Christians today come from a Gentile background, very few were born as Jews. Today we call Jewish believers in Christ "*Messianic Jews*;" they are fulfilled Jews who have found their Messiah. How do we see Gentiles (aliens from the commonwealth of Israel) being included in **Eph 2:11-13 & Gal. 3:26-29**? How are Gentiles brought into the family of God today? (See **Eph. 1:4-6; 2:8-9; Rom. 8:12-17, 22-23; Gal. 3:4-5**)

7. What is the second promise that God made to Abraham in **chapter 17 (vs. 8)**? If God promised the Holy Land to Abraham, why is it such a battleground today? What is the Scriptural basis of Israel's right to the Promised Land? (See **Gen. 15:7; 17:8; 22:17**) According to **verse 8**, how long would this promise stand? Why do the Arabs want to usurp that right today? Does all of this go back to Abram and Sarai wanting to help God by doing things their way? What happens today when we operate in the flesh (guided by our old sin nature)?

Part II: Circumcision is the outward sign of inclusion in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:9-14)

1. What command did God give to Abraham in **verse 9**? Who was bound by the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant? Notice the words "*My covenant.*" What makes the word "*My*" so significant here?

2. It is important to note that at this point in the story, the only child Abram had was Ishmael through Hagar, but he was not the child of promise. The only land the Patriarchs owned during their lifetimes was the cave at Machpelah which was the family burial site. Where would the Hebrews have to go before they could come back and possess the Promised Land? (See **Gen. 15:12-16**) How long would they have to go there for? Why would this require great faith on the part of the Patriarchs and their descendants? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to trust God for the outcome when you couldn't see the end?

3. According to **verse 10**, what would the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant be? Note: Circumcision was practiced by other people groups in Abraham's day, not just the Jews. What made Jewish circumcision different from that of the other nations?

4. What twofold message was being given to the Jewish people through circumcision (**vs. 11**)? (Hint: See Teaching Aim) What major health benefit do we find when men are circumcised?

5. At what age were Jewish males to be circumcised (**vs. 12**)? (See **Lev. 12:1-3**) Why at 8 days? (See Commentaries) Does this demonstrate the faith of the parents or the faith of the child? At what age are Arab males circumcised today? Why? (Hint: Search online) According to **verses 12 & 13**, which individuals were to be circumcised?

6. Have you ever wondered why so many churches practice paedobaptism (or infant) baptism? Do you realize that infant baptism has been the predominant way to baptize people of the Christian faith throughout church history? Many people say that circumcision is the sign of the Old Covenant while water baptism is the sign of the New Covenant. With that in mind, why do you think so many Christians want to baptize their children as infants? (See **Gen. 17:10-12**) What New Testament verses do the proponents of infant baptism use to support their position? (See **Acts 16:14-15; 10:47-48; 16:29-34**) Do any of these verses clearly state that infants were included among those being baptized?

7. Do these same verses seem to imply that those being baptized made a conscious decision? (See **Acts 8:36; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 29-34**) Why should every Christian be baptized? (See **Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21**) What is the symbolism in baptism by immersion?

8. According to **verse 14**, what would happen to any Jew who refused the sign of the covenant? Was Abraham saved by being circumcised? (See **Rom. 4:9-12**) How was he saved? (See **Gen. 15:6**) According to **Col. 2:11-14**, what is true circumcision? Circumcision of the heart is something that is done by the Holy Spirit of God at the moment of conversion (or the moment of regeneration). It symbolizes the casting off of the old sin nature (the flesh), and inclusion into the covenant community of God – the Church. What can we learn from **1 Cor. 12:12-14**? Is it only the Jews, or Jews and Gentiles alike who receive this circumcision?

Part III: Abraham's response to God's promises and His commands (Gen. 17:15-27)

1. What is the significance of Sarai's name change in **verse 15**? (See Commentaries) What promise is given to Sarah in **verse 16**? How is this a part of the Abrahamic Covenant? Sarah was almost 90 when God visited Abraham, how did Abraham respond in **verses 17 & 18**? Why would Abraham react in this way (**vs. 18**)?
2. What was God's response to Abraham's request in **verse 18 (vs. 19)**? For how long did God say His promise would stand? What special promise did God make for Ishmael in **verse 20**? What people group is Ishmael the father of today?
3. As we come to **verse 21**, keep in mind that Abraham was 99 years old, and Sarah almost 90. How firm was God's promise to this famous couple. What did God do once He was finished sharing. How does **verse 22** end? Do you find this a fitting illustration of God & His Word?
4. How did Abraham respond to God's command in **verse 23**? How old was Abraham when he was circumcised (**vs. 24**)? What can we learn about Ishmael from **verse 25**? What makes the age of 13 so significant? According to **verses 26 & 27**, who did Abraham circumcise? How long did Abraham wait? Do you ever delay following the Lord's commands? Why?
5. Have you been baptized? When? Were you baptized because of your own faith or because of the faith of your parents. If you haven't been baptized, what is stopping you? If you would like to be baptized, please notify a member of the church staff or one of the elders.

MINER'S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!*

- In **Acts chapter 7**, Stephen gave the Jewish religious leaders a lesson on the history of the Hebrew people which ultimately would point toward their need for Jesus Christ.
- Stephen pointed the religious leaders back to the Abrahamic Covenant and to the sign of circumcision which God had given to Abraham.
- The Abrahamic Covenant was twofold: God promised that He would give Abraham descendants like the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore; He also promised He would give Abraham's descendants the Promised Land.
- Circumcision is an act of obedience that symbolizes inclusion in the covenant community.
- Circumcision presents a positive and negative picture: on the positive side, it symbolizes the cutting off of the flesh and living for God; on the negative side, it symbolizes, "*If I violate the terms of this covenant, let this happen to me,*" (meaning being cut off and cast away).
- That very same day, Abraham, his son Ishmael, and all of his men were circumcised, Abraham obeyed God's command immediately.