



## TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

### Talk Genesis 17:1-14: The Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant

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#### Lesson 36

*"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: 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. 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." 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."*

#### Background Notes

When we compare verse 1 of this chapter with the last verse of chapter 16, we see that thirteen years have passed since the birth of Ishmael. All during this time there is no record in Scripture of God communicating with Abraham. Maybe this was part of God's discipline for Abram and Sarai using Hagar in the way that they did. But in chapter 17 the Lord came to Abram once again, when he was ninety-nine years old. God confirmed His covenant with Abram, the covenant promises He had made with Abram, and God changed his name from Abram to Abraham. The name Abram means "exalted father," and Abraham means "father of a multitude." Can you imagine Abraham telling his servants that now he is "father of a multitude." That took a lot of faith! In fact, there may have been some laughs among the servants when Abraham related this name change, but God was specific in His reason for the name change. ", " *I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you*" (v6). Both "nations" and "kings" are **plural**, so God was quite specific in the way He changed Abraham's name.

God formally established the Abrahamic covenant by instituting circumcision as the sign of the covenant. Notice, from verse 12, that the baby boys were to be circumcised

when they were eight days old. With today's medical knowledge, we know that at eight days the vitamin needed for the optimum clotting of blood reaches its peak in the body of the newborn.

Why was circumcision used as a sign for the Abrahamic covenant? Well, there are several reasons. First and foremost, the Abrahamic covenant had to do with the "promised seed" and descendants of Abraham. I think that you can see that the obvious association is between circumcision and the means of having children. Furthermore, this sign would visibly confront and remind any Jewish male and female who were about to depart from God's clearly defined sexual boundaries.

And then of course, circumcision was a "cutting rite," or "cutting ceremony." The implication was that if the Jewish male was not circumcised (didn't keep the covenant), then that person was to be "cut off" from the covenant community. *"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" (v14).* Cut off from his people! In some cases, it meant the individual was put out of the covenant community. In some cases, it actually meant death.

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. God can and will keep His covenant with believers.**

Notice the number of times that God says, "I will" in the first eight verses of Genesis 17. "I will make my covenant between Me and you. I will multiply you exceedingly" (v2). "I will make you a father of many nations" (v5). "I will make you exceedingly fruitful. I will make nations of you and kings shall come from you" (v6). "I will establish my covenant between Me and you, and your descendants after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant" (v7). "I will give to you and your descendants the land, and I will be their God" (v8). God **will** keep His covenant!

Notice that the Lord calls it "My" covenant, not "our" covenant. God planned and designed and initiated the covenant. It is **His** covenant, and God will keep His covenant.

Notice the name by which God revealed Himself to Abraham in verse 1: "*I am Almighty God*" or "El Shaddai." This is the first occurrence of this name of God in the Bible – El Shaddai. The idea in "El Shaddai" or "God Almighty" is not just raw power and supreme power, but majestic might, and in many contexts where El Shaddai is used (as here), it refers to God's majestic might and ability to keep His promises. God is "El Shaddai," "God Almighty," the all-sufficient God -- because He is able to keep His promises! God can and will keep His covenant with believers.

Just as God can and will keep the Abrahamic covenant, so He can and will keep His covenant with Christians. He has promised (covenanted with) us, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5). Do you believe that promise? If you are a Christian here this morning, remember God can and will keep this promise. It's a covenant! He may have to discipline you. There may be broken fellowship at times, but God will never leave you or forsake you. God can and will keep His covenant with believers.

### **2. Believers are obligated to walk in line with God's covenant.**

Notice in verse 7 that the Abrahamic covenant was an unconditional and everlasting covenant. *"And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant..."* An everlasting covenant cannot be broken. But even though the Abrahamic covenant was and is an unconditional covenant, Abraham and his descendants were obligated to keep it. Let's take a look at verse 9, *"And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations."*

Keeping the covenant was not just practicing circumcision, the sign of the covenant, but walking in line with the covenant. Look back at verse 1: *"I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless."* Just as Abraham and his descendants were obligated to walk in line with God's covenant, so believers today are obligated to walk in line with God's covenant. He has covenanted to save us and keep us secure, but we are obligated to walk in line with that covenant. Not in order to keep our salvation – no, that is eternally secure – but out of love and gratitude for our Lord.

In I Peter 1:15-16 we read: *"as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."* God has not called us on the basis of our holiness, because we are sinners! But now that we are called and saved from our sin, we are obligated to walk in line with that holy calling. I Peter 1:15-16 once again: *"as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."* Believers are obligated to walk in line with God's covenant.

Now we know that it's impossible for us to walk 100% holy lives before we get to heaven. We still have the sinful nature until we get our resurrected bodies when we are in glory. I John 1:8 says: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* So we do sin, and yet, I John 2:1 says: *"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin."*

The point is that believers are obligated, with the Lord's help, to strive to lead holy lives as much as possible. God doesn't say in I Peter 1:15-16, to be 95% holy, or even 99% holy, but the ideal is stated **"Be holy, for I am holy."** Believers are obligated to walk in line with God's covenant.

### **Practical Application: Why not try the best formula for living?**

What is the best formula for living? Get everything out of life that you can? Get all that is coming to you? What about, "You only go around once!" or "Do your own thing!" These are all formulas for living, but they are the world's formulas. Why not try the best formula for living? The formula is right here in Genesis 17:1: *"I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless."*

It really doesn't get any better than that! Because God created us, He knows all about us. He knows what is best for us, and He knows what is not good for us.

Here's an illustration. Trains were designed to run on tracks -- but suppose a train decided that it wanted more freedom, so it left the track to have more fun in the countryside. I'm so sorry! That train just lost **all** its freedom by leaving the track. That's where its freedom is, on the track.

Do you see the point for us? In the same way, "doing your own thing" does not bring freedom. God has designed us for Himself, to run on His track. Walk before God and be blameless. That's the best formula for living!