

The Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant

Gen. 17

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I. Introduction

The Lord's covenant with Abraham establishes for him—and for all of His covenant people—a new _____. But in order for Abraham and his descendants after him to inhabit that future, they are called to walk rightly with their God. This new way of walking begins with the mark of circumcision.

II. Text: Genesis 17:1-27

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. . .

III. Squaring the Circle?

A question is prompted by comparing this chapter to Gen. 15. How is the covenant presented in Gen. 17 the *same* covenant as that described in Gen. 15? The covenant in Gen. 15 was a _____ covenant. In other words, the Lord made the covenant, and He took upon Himself—without any obligations for (the sleeping) Abraham—all of the responsibility for bringing that covenant to pass.

When we come to Gen. 17, however, we find that Abraham now has to _____ something. He's not asleep anymore. Abraham has covenant obligations, and he has to walk in the covenant. In fact, he and his descendants have to keep the covenant, or else they'll be _____ of the covenant.

IV. The Unconditionality of the Covenant

The unconditionality of the covenant is described especially in Gen. 15 where the Lord God walks between the slain beasts while Abraham sleeps, declaring what He Himself will do. This aspect is likewise found in Gen. 17:4-8, where the Lord declares that His covenant with Abraham is an _____ covenant, and that He will prove good on all His word to Abraham. God is not speaking of what He *might* do, but of what He *will* do.

The covenant is unconditional from the angle of God's _____ commitment to His covenant with Abraham. It is an everlasting covenant, and it shall never be replaced or abrogated—no matter what. The New Covenant sealed with the blood of Christ *is* the Abrahamic covenant. It contains fuller and expanded promises; it is assured to us with a better covenant ritual. But it is the _____ covenant (e.g., Gal. 3:16; 4:5; Luke 1:68-75).

V. The Condition of the Covenant

Circumcision of the flesh requires circumcision of the _____. If the two don't go together—if the sign and the reality do not coincide—then that person is tearing asunder what God has united as one. Circumcision of the flesh and circumcision of the heart are of one piece. It marks the man off as belonging to God, and so the man better give himself to God—otherwise he's breaking the covenant, and the Lord warns that such a man will be cut off from His covenant people.

VI. Squaring the Covenant

How do we square this ‘condition of the covenant’ with the ‘unconditionality of the covenant’? We do this by distinguishing between _____ within the covenant and the _____ itself. God’s covenant will hold. It will never be abrogated. It will never be turned back. God is unconditionally committed to His covenant with Abraham, as mediated by Christ Jesus. The future is certain. God’s people will reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:1-5). But the condition comes in with the question: Where are *you* going to be? Will that blessed future be *your* blessed future?

The Lord spells out His covenant for us, seals it with His life, and then turns to us and says, “As for you, _____ my covenant. Be circumcised in your heart. Be baptized into Christ. Be baptized into His death, buried with Him, and raised with Him out of the deadness of your sin and into the newness of His life.”

VII. By Way of Warning

The nature of the covenant warns us against covenant _____. Covenant presumptuousness is when God’s covenant people neglect obedience to God and a careful attention to His Word on the false assumption that just because they’re Jewish—or, just because you’re a Christian—God will indulge bad behavior and tolerate sin and put up with bad attitudes.

The waters of _____ are to wash not only our bodies, but our lives, for those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are baptized into His death: “Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, *even so we also should walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4).

VIII. By Way of Encouragement

We have a God who is absolutely, unconditionally committed to His covenant promises and to His covenant people. He has demonstrated this commitment time and time again.

- Even when Israel disobeyed and strayed from Him in the wilderness—*yet God remained _____*. He punished those who were disobedient, but He did not abandon His covenant people. He brought them into the land and drove out the inhabitants.
- Even when they grew fat in the land and departed from their Lord, every man doing what was good in his own eyes—*yet God remained faithful*. He _____ them, using the surrounding nations as His rod, and then He gave them judges for their deliverance.
- Even when Israel’s kings went astray and their prophets proved _____—*yet God remained faithful*. He sent them into exile and punished their iniquity, yet He did not abandon or forsake His people. He brought them out of exile and planted them again in their land.
- Even when all seemed utterly bleak, when God’s people lay under Roman rule, when Israel’s leaders were walking tombs of unbelief and hypocrisy—*yet God remained faithful*.

If we waver, it is not because our God wavers in His commitment to us. It is because we waver in _____. When we come to the covenant, all we have is encouragement to trust in Him. We have the encouragement of a God who rejoices to do good to us, who will assuredly bring us into the promised inheritance—and do so with all of His heart and with all of His soul. This is our God, and He calls you to walk humbly with Him.