

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: Covenant: God's Way of Relationship



A Teaching Sermon: "Abraham: The Covenant of Promise, Part Three"

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God doesn't suggest. God doesn't negotiate. God solemnly charged Abram, "Get out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you: and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 12.1-3)

Abram left to go into the land of Canaan. He passed through the land unto the place of Shechem, and again the LORD appeared and said, "Unto your seed will I give this land," and there Abram built an altar unto the LORD.

In Genesis 15 we find the formal inauguration of the Abrahamic covenant.

God made all these promises to Abram. "How shall I know that I shall inherit the land You have promised?" (Genesis 15.8) Abram believes, but he wants strong assurance. He is old and getting older and has no heir unless he adopts a "son" to become legal heir. God had said that a son born of Abram's own loins will possess the promises (15.4). How?

God gives assurance by a formal ratification of a covenant bond in blood. Abram is to present certain animals before Him (15.9). He halves the animals and sets the pieces over against each other. He slays the birds, but doesn't divide them. Birds of prey come, but Abram frightens them away. He passes into a visionary state. He receives an overview of history and is encouraged to wait patiently. For 400 years descendants will endure oppression in a strange land and then come out with great possessions. Finally, they will enter the land as promised. (Gen. 15.13, 14) Why the delay? Because the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full (v. 16).

A smoking oven and a flaming torch pass between the pieces (v. 17). God cut the covenant. God pledged Himself to life and death in an action establishing an oath of self-malediction. If the commitment is broken, their own bodies were to be torn in pieces just as the animals had been divided ceremonially. God bound Himself in a solemn blood-oath to the fulfillment of the promises given Abram. The promises are sealed with a self-maledictory oath. This is the strong assurance given.

Again, in Genesis 17:1, 2, the LORD declares without conversation, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and will multiply you exceedingly...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. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 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. Also, I will 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.”(Genesis 17:1-8)

And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 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, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. (Genesis 17:9-11)

Abram did not pass between the divided pieces. Only God passed between the pieces. God assumed to Himself the full responsibility for seeing that every promise of the covenant would be realized. Abram is not without obligations and requirements. He had to leave his father and land. He will have to circumcise all males as the seal of the covenant. He will have to obey.

In Genesis 17 God establishes the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. It is to be circumcision. This seal carries forward to believers today with the covenant-sealing Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1.13, 14).

In Genesis 17.6-8 God recounts His commitments, all that He is going to do. Then God announces, “You shall keep My covenant, you and your seed after you.” Every male is to be circumcised. The covenant shall be in their flesh. It is not optional. We could even say that the seal is the covenant. It bears witness perpetually. It won’t be done as an introduction into manhood, but on the eighth day in the life of an infant. And, it will be open to gentiles because it was not intended to be a racial badge but a covenantal sign. (Exodus 12.43-49)

If the sign is rejected, then that soul shall be cut off from his people. (v. 14) He is excommunicated from fellowship in the covenantal community. Infant circumcision brought children into the covenant community. God works in families and cares about families. This is not a dedication of infants. This is giving infants the sign of the covenant.

Circumcision did not start with the Israelites, but the Canaanites did not practice it. Circumcision did, however, reveal some things about God’s grace.

1. Inclusion in the covenant community is by grace. An infant makes no choice for the covenant. However, adult males did.
2. Circumcision demonstrated the need for cleansing. Physical descent alone does not make one a true Israelite. Uncleaness and disqualification of nature had to be taken away for relationship between a holy God and an unholy people. It is an act of humility.
3. Circumcision demonstrates that man by nature needs cleansing, the removal of defilement. The act symbolizes the process needed.
4. By cutting away the foreskin, the sinner undergoes a judgment that purifies. The whole human race is sinful, with a sin nature. Circumcision implies the guilt of the human race.
5. In this act the promise concerning the seed, the land, and the blessing are all sealed in a single sign.
6. Circumcision indicates the status of a man in relation to God and in relation to the covenant community of God.

7. It is an outward sign, but God is after the heart. (Deut. 10.16; 30.6; Jeremiah 4.4) To be uncircumcised is to be unclean, defiled, unworthy, and unholy.

To fulfill all righteousness, Jesus underwent the prescribed rites of cleansing (Matthew 3.15). Jesus submitted first to circumcision as an infant and later to the baptism of John. (Luke 2.21). Jesus' cleansing is for the sake of the sinful people whom He is saving.

In the New Covenant Gentiles need not become Jews before becoming Christians. Both become new creatures through oneness with Christ by means of faith alone. It is the Holy Spirit who now purifies the believer. (Acts 15.8, 9; Galatians 5.2) The act is not done as a formal rite, yet Paul ordered the circumcision of Timothy in Acts 16.3 to demonstrate freedom in Christ (1 Cor. 9.22). The rituals and formalities of the shadow must give way to the reality of the new covenant.

In the new, cleansing from impurity and incorporation into covenant community continue as reality replaces this shadow. (Romans 4.3, 9-12) Circumcision seals the reality of righteousness, a righteousness that comes by faith in Christ. In Romans 2.25-29 true circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit accomplishes the real cleansing necessary and sufficient to make one acceptable to God. In Philippians 3.3 the one who worships in the Spirit of God personifies the reality of circumcision's essence. In 2 Corinthians 1.22 God sealed us and gave us the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Baptism replaces circumcision, i.e., one cleansing rite replaces the other. (Colossians 2.11, 12)

¹¹ In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body ^[a] of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. Colossians 2:11, 12, NKJV

The cutting off represents the violent removal of the inherently sinful nature of humanity. Baptism signifies the work of the Holy Spirit, not the person. It is grace.

Descendants, land, I am your shield and reward, in the mount of the LORD it shall be provided, in your seed all the nations will be blessed. The blessing of Abraham equals Jesus. Abraham-to a clan-to a nation-to a split northern and southern kingdoms-to the downfall of each-to a Messiah-to the whole world-Galatians 3-to the Promise of the Father. Believe in Jesus. Believe Jesus. Believe what Jesus believes. ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them [the Jews], "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." John 8:58 NKJV

**"In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,
because you have obeyed My voice." (Gen 22:18)**

May the grace and blessing of the Covenant Lord be with you,

Mary Craig

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**"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."
Revelation 21:7**

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